



# Power, control and resistance within worker co-operatives : an ethnography of a co-operative factory

Stéphane Jaumier

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**UNIVERSITE PARIS-DAUPHINE**  
**ECOLE DOCTORALE DE DAUPHINE**

**Pouvoir, contrôle et résistance dans les coopératives de salariés :**  
**Une ethnographie d'une coopérative ouvrière**

**Thèse pour l'obtention du titre de docteur en sciences de gestion**

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# INTRODUCTION



*Democratic forms of organization are not 'nice' because they fail to protect the individual from 'the dirt' – the existential insecurity – associated with competing value-orientations and interests. But, in this process, the inherently moral quality of social reality is at once experienced and celebrated.*

*Willmott (1993, p. 534)*

## **Introduction**

### ***Actualité des coopératives***

La recherche en sciences de gestion manifeste depuis quelques années un intérêt renouvelé pour les coopératives. Témoignent de ce regain d'intérêt pour cette forme organisationnelle plusieurs publications récentes dans des revues de référence (Ashforth et Reingen, 2014 ; Boone et Ozcan, 2014 ; Bryer, 2014) ainsi que divers appels à communication et numéros spéciaux (Cheney *et al.*, 2014 ; Joannidès *et al.*, à paraître). Les coopératives ont constitué de longue date, et ce de manière relativement ininterrompue, un objet d'étude privilégié pour les chercheurs intéressés par la démocratie organisationnelle et la participation des salariés, ce dont des revues telles qu'*Economic and Industrial Democracy* (Westenholz, 1999 ; Hernandez, 2006 ; Cornforth, 1995) ou encore *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics* (Stryjan, 1994 ; Spear *et al.*, 2004) se sont par exemple faites les témoins. Mais c'est la présence des coopératives au point d'intersection de deux courants de recherche plus récents qui justifie le regain d'intérêt observé aujourd'hui pour cette forme organisationnelle, à savoir en premier lieu les travaux portant sur le pluralisme et en second lieu ceux se penchant sur les formes alternatives d'organisation.

L'intérêt pour le pluralisme au sein des sciences de gestion est essentiellement porté par la théorie néo-institutionnelle (TNI). Chez cette dernière, le constat selon lequel la société est composée d'une pluralité de référentiels de valeurs est déjà ancien (Friedland et Alford, 1991). Mais pendant longtemps, l'idée a dominé que ce conflit entre valeurs concurrentes était résolu au niveau d'un champ d'activités (Thornton et Ocasio, 1999 ; Rao *et al.*, 2003). Ce n'est que relativement récemment que l'idée selon laquelle les organisations et même les individus pouvaient être confrontés au pluralisme institutionnel et à la complexité qui en résulte s'est imposée (Greenwood *et al.*, 2011 ; Greenwood *et al.*, 2010). Le terme d'« hybride » est celui généralement retenu pour qualifier les organisations au sein desquelles



deux systèmes de valeurs concurrents cherchent à cohabiter (Pache et Santos, 2013b ; Battilana et Dorado, 2010). Parmi les organisations hybrides les plus étudiées se trouvent celles qui cherchent à concilier des objectifs de nature sociale ou environnementale avec les contraintes économiques liées à l'exercice d'une activité marchande, à savoir les entreprises sociales (Doherty *et al.*, 2014) ainsi que les organisations de l'économie sociale et solidaire telles que les mutuelles (Almandoz, 2014) et les coopératives (Ashforth et Reingen, 2014). Dans ce cadre, les chercheurs visent généralement à mettre en évidence les réponses organisationnelles (Besharov et Smith, 2014) ou bien les pratiques individuelles (Pache et Santos, 2013a) permettant de gérer la conflictualité associée à ces demandes plurielles. Aux côtés de la TNI, d'autres cadres peuvent également être mobilisés à cet effet – c'est le cas par exemple de l'approche par les paradoxes (Smith et Lewis, 2011 ; Ashforth et Reingen, 2014) – même si le recours à ces perspectives alternatives reste plutôt marginal.

Le deuxième axe de recherche dynamique au sein duquel la forme coopérative occupe une position importante est celui qui se consacre à l'étude des formes alternatives d'organisation. Il s'agit cette fois d'étudier, dans une perspective critique qui rattache plus largement ce courant à celui des études critiques en management (Golsorkhi *et al.*, 2009 ; Parker et Thomas, 2011), les formes organisationnelles susceptibles de constituer des alternatives aux formes dominantes associées au capitalisme (Parker *et al.*, 2014). Même si ce programme de recherche peut difficilement être qualifié de neuf, il bénéficie en tout cas d'un souffle et d'une légitimité renouvelés en conséquence du déclenchement de la crise financière de 2007-2008 et des remises en cause du capitalisme qui l'accompagnent (Adler, 2014 ; Du Gay et Morgan, 2013 ; Chiapello, 2013), ce dont plusieurs appels à communication et numéros spéciaux récents témoignent là aussi (Barin Cruz *et al.*, 2014 ; Zanoni *et al.*, 2015). L'objectif visé par ce courant de recherche est donc plus radical que celui qui sous-tend les recherches sur le pluralisme. Alors qu'il s'agit le plus souvent chez ce dernier d'étudier les façons dont le capitalisme peut accommoder la poursuite d'objectifs responsables, le premier vise avec plus d'ambition, et pour parler en des termes proches de ceux de Polanyi, à ré-encaster l'économie dans les relations sociales ainsi qu'à dégager des voies possibles d'émancipation (Ghiglione et Farias, 2015). Les problématiques de pouvoir y occupent en conséquence une place tout à fait centrale. Là encore, les coopératives constituent un des possibles objets d'étude (Webb et Cheney, 2014), aux côtés par exemple des communautés intentionnelles (Farias, 2015) et des mouvements open-source (Pearce, 2014).

Afin de resituer les organisations coopératives en tant qu'objet d'étude, je propose dans les sections qui suivent de fournir tout d'abord quelques repères historiques relatifs au mouvement coopératif français, d'apporter ensuite des éléments d'information sur les coopératives de salariés, puis de discuter enfin certains des principaux enjeux contemporains relatifs à l'étude des coopératives dans les sciences de gestion.

### ***Permanence des coopératives***

Au sein de chacun des deux courants de recherche mentionnés, i.e. pluralisme et formes alternatives d'organisation, la forme coopérative se différencie de la plupart des autres formes organisationnelles étudiées par son caractère d'ancienneté (Barin Cruz *et al.*, 2014). Ses origines remontent en effet au XIXe siècle, la naissance du mouvement coopératif étant généralement associée à la création en 1844 près de Manchester de la *Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers*, coopérative de consommation fondée sous l'impulsion d'un groupe de tisserands et d'activistes associés au mouvement oweniste (Fairbairn, 1994). Même s'il existe de nombreuses organisations de type coopératif à avoir précédé l'expérience mise sur pied à Rochdale (Espagne, 2000), c'est celle-ci qui a été retenue pour sa portée fondatrice dans la mesure où les statuts de la *Rochdale Society* posèrent les bases des valeurs et principes tels qu'ils furent ensuite développés au sein du mouvement coopératif (Birchall, 1997). En particulier, y étaient déjà acquises les notions d'orientation du bénéfice de l'activité vers les membres de la coopérative et de contrôle démocratique de l'organisation par ces mêmes membres (Fairbairn, 1994).

En France, le mouvement coopératif a également pris son essor au XIXe siècle, en se construisant tout à la fois sur des utopies populaires, en particulier celles associées à des pratiques communautaires antérieures à la Révolution française et inscrites dans des cadres religieux ou bien professionnels, et sur les théorisations nouvelles de penseurs tels que Saint-Simon, Fourier et Proudhon (Espagne, 2000). Les mouvements ouvriers de la première moitié du XIXe siècle qui investissent l'utopie coopérative incorporent ainsi des idées et pratiques ambivalentes vis-à-vis de la Révolution française (Espagne, 2000). D'un côté, ils s'attachent à renouer avec les communautés de métier et formes de compagnonnage précisément mises à mal par la Révolution (Demoustier, 1984). De l'autre, ils cherchent à parachever les promesses égalitaires ouvertes par celle-ci en travaillant au dépassement de la propriété privée par la mise en œuvre des théories communistes.

Au cours des XIX<sup>e</sup> et XX<sup>e</sup> siècles, la trajectoire suivie par le mouvement coopératif sera celle d'un passage graduel d'une vision conquérante et totalisante de l'utopie coopérative à une vision plus modeste et également plus plurielle (Espagne, 2000). Aux ambitions initiales qui visaient le déploiement de l'utopie coopérative à l'ensemble du champ politique et social – l'organisation collective du travail ne constituant qu'un élément parmi d'autres au sein d'un projet ayant plus largement pour objectif l'avènement d'un mode de vie communautaire – vont en effet progressivement se substituer des objectifs plus limités, cantonnés à la gestion coopérative de certaines activités économiques, et ceci en cohabitation avec un système capitaliste dont le caractère dominant est de moins en moins contesté. Espagne (2000) pointe quelques-unes des étapes importantes qui ont balisé cette déperdition progressive du projet de transformation globale de la société incarné par le mouvement coopératif naissant : les critiques exprimées par Proudhon dans les années 1840 vis-à-vis du caractère absolutiste de l'utopie coopérative et ses appels à une coopération plus pragmatique et soucieuse de diversité ; l'opposition au sein du mouvement ouvrier, sous la III<sup>e</sup> République, entre les forces syndicales et le mouvement coopératif, contraignant ce dernier à une alliance avec les gouvernements républicains qui le conduit à sa dépolitiser. Dès 1935, l'affaire semble entendue puisque Fauquet, dans un ouvrage intitulé *Le secteur coopératif*, évacue sans ménagement la possibilité d'une économie entièrement coopérative (Espagne, 2000). La vitalité du secteur coopératif dépendra dès lors des évolutions du contexte politique et économique : elle tend à se renforcer dans les périodes d'incertitude économique et de mise en cause du capitalisme, et, à l'opposé, marquer le pas pendant les périodes plus prospères (Birchall, 2011). C'est dans ce cadre que la crise financière et économique initiée en 2007-2008 marque un regain d'intérêt notable pour la forme coopérative (CG-SCOP, 2015 ; United Nations, 2012), regain inconnu dans le cas français depuis les expériences autogestionnaires de la fin des années soixante et des années soixante-dix, qui s'inscrivaient alors dans le prolongement des mouvements contestataires de 1968 (Boltanski et Chiapello, 1999).

### ***Les coopératives de salariés en France aujourd'hui***

La littérature distingue trois types de coopératives (Birchall, 2011 ; Schneiberg *et al.*, 2008) : les coopératives de producteurs ; les coopératives d'acheteurs, clients et usagers, parmi lesquelles notamment les banques et assurances mutualistes ; et enfin les coopératives de salariés. Le développement relatif de ces différents types coopératifs a partie liée avec les contextes nationaux, les coopératives de consommation ayant par exemple, dans la lignée de

Rochdale, joué un rôle prédominant au sein du mouvement coopératif britannique (Fairbairn, 1994 ; Webb et Webb, 1914) et celles de producteurs similairement aux Etats-Unis (Boone et Ozcan, 2014 ; Fairbairn, 1994). En France, et ce dans la lignée de la vision industrielle prônée par Saint-Simon, le mouvement coopératif s'est historiquement constitué autour des activités salariées dans les secteurs en voie d'industrialisation (Birchall, 2011 ; Demoustier, 1984 ; Espagne, 2000). C'est précisément vers les coopératives de salariés que j'ai choisi d'orienter mon étude dans la mesure où c'est l'impact du double-statut de salarié-et-associé sur la gestion de la coopérative, en particulier sur les problématiques de pouvoir, contrôle et résistance, qui m'intéressait.

Les coopératives de salariés françaises sont rassemblées sous l'appellation SCOP, initialement pour « Société Coopérative Ouvrière de Production », puis depuis 2010 pour « Société Coopérative et Participative », un statut juridique qui mixe des éléments de droit commercial et de droit coopératif en inspiration directe des préceptes promus par l'Alliance Coopérative Internationale (Moulin, 2014 ; Espagne, 2001). Plus de 2 600 SCOP opèrent aujourd'hui en France, employant plus de 50 000 salariés dont près de 26 000 sont également associés (CG-SCOP, 2015). D'un point de vue institutionnel, les SCOP sont représentées à l'échelon national par la Confédération Générale des SCOP (CG-SCOP) et supportées localement par des Unions Régionales des SCOP (URSCOP). La CG-SCOP est en charge de la promotion du modèle coopératif et cherche à accentuer sa reconnaissance politique et institutionnelle. Les URSCOP sont en charge de fournir un support direct (à caractère légal, financier, gestionnaire en même temps que relatif à la mise en œuvre de la culture coopérative) à la création et au fonctionnement pérenne des coopératives situées dans leur zone géographique. Bien que la plupart des coopératives de salariés soient directement constituées sous la forme SCOP, le recours à la forme coopérative est dans le même temps de plus en plus reconnu comme un moyen possible d'organiser la succession lors du départ en retraite des fondateurs de PME. Un cinquième des SCOP désormais constituées concernent des entreprises existantes qui adoptent la forme coopérative au départ de leurs propriétaires (CG-SCOP, 2012).

Bien que les coopératives de salariés s'appuient sur une histoire ancienne, elles relèvent d'un modèle qui n'est néanmoins pas figé. De nombreuses innovations ont ainsi vu le jour au sein du mouvement coopératif ces dernières décennies de façon à répondre aux opportunités ou contraintes associées aux évolutions du contexte socio-économique : désindustrialisation, émergence de nouvelles formes de travail, désengagement progressif de l'Etat vis-à-vis de

certaines secteurs sociaux, etc. Sont notamment apparues ces dernières années deux nouvelles formes de SCOP, les SCIC (Sociétés Coopératives d'Intérêt Collectif) et les CAE (Coopératives d'Activités et d'Emploi). Basées sur un nouveau statut juridique datant de 2001, les SCIC visent à associer des parties prenantes multiples à la gestion d'activités économiques dont la contribution à l'intérêt général (préservation de l'environnement, services aux plus défavorisés, etc.) est reconnue par les pouvoirs publics (Cateura et Becuwe, 2014). Les CAE regroupent quant à elles des entrepreneurs qui souhaitent, pour démarrer leur activité, mettre en commun certaines ressources au sein d'une structure coopérative (Boudes, 2014 ; Brûlé-Gapihan et Boudes, 2015).

Après avoir fourni des éléments de natures historique et institutionnelle permettant de mieux situer la position et l'importance des coopératives de salariés, je développe dans la section qui suit des éléments de réflexion sur les enjeux contemporains relatifs à l'étude des coopératives dans les sciences de gestion et présente le plan adopté pour la thèse.

### **Enjeux et structure de la thèse : pouvoir, contrôle et résistance dans les coopératives de salariés**

#### ***Enjeux de l'étude contemporaines des coopératives : de la gouvernance aux questions de pouvoir, contrôle et résistance***

Certains des enjeux liés à l'étude contemporaine des coopératives par les sciences de gestion ont déjà été soulignés en introduction. J'ai rappelé en particulier que les coopératives constituent un objet approprié dans l'étude d'une part du pluralisme et de ses effets organisationnels et d'autre part des formes alternatives d'organisation. Au sein de ces deux courants de recherche, la forme coopérative présente un bénéfice d'ordre empirique vis-à-vis d'autres formes organisationnelles plus récentes, leur ancienneté et leur permanence autorisant notamment les approches historiques ou tout au moins des études longitudinales sur des périodes longues (Schneiberg, 2006 ; Boone et Ozcan, 2014 ; Cornforth, 1995 ; Smith *et al.*, 2011). Je voudrais maintenant préciser ce qui me semble un des enjeux principaux relatifs à l'étude contemporaine des coopératives, c'est-à-dire la nécessité de dépasser l'attention aux seuls règles et mécanismes de gouvernance coopérative (Spear *et al.*, 2004), encore trop souvent dominante dans la littérature, pour embrasser la question plus large de l'incorporation des valeurs et principes coopératifs dans les pratiques les plus quotidiennes des coopérateurs,

en particulier celles qui participent de l'actualisation des relations de pouvoir au sein de la coopérative.

Les problématiques associées au gouvernement d'entreprise constituent un axe de recherche tout à fait majeur dans la gestion des entreprises capitalistes (Gomez et Korine, 2009 ; Segrestin et Hatchuel, 2012), et il est naturel que les recherches académiques dédiées aux coopératives de salariés se soient également emparées de cette thématique (Bataille-Chedotel et Huntzinger, 2004 ; Cornforth, 2004 ; Bakaikoa *et al.*, 2004 ; Gand et Segrestin, 2009 ; Storey *et al.*, 2014). En particulier, le dépassement de la distinction classique entre actionnaires, dirigeants et salariés, tel qu'impliqué par le double statut de salarié-et-associé, mène à l'identification de défis bien spécifiques à la gouvernance coopérative (Spear *et al.*, 2004). Il s'agit notamment d'étudier comment le principe démocratique « une personne, une voix » doit trouver sa traduction dans les statuts de la coopérative, comment en particulier, au-delà d'un certain effectif, la transition de formes de démocratie directe vers des formes de démocratie représentative peut être assurée (Hernandez, 2006), l'étendue des pouvoirs à confier aux organes représentatifs ainsi créés (Bakaikoa *et al.*, 2004), leur degré souhaitable de professionnalisation (Bataille-Chedotel et Huntzinger, 2004), et les moyens de contrôle devant s'exercer sur leur action (Bakaikoa *et al.*, 2004). Il s'agit en résumé d'analyser les règles qui garantissent, dans un contexte qui se veut démocratique, la constitution et la continuité de ce que Gand et Segrestin (2009) appellent une « autorité de gestion », c'est-à-dire d'instances décisionnaires à la fois légitimes et opérantes.

La question de la conception des règles de gouvernance est évidemment fondamentale pour l'analyse et la compréhension des organisations coopératives et le nier serait contre-productif. Cela dit, une fixation sur ce seul aspect, telle qu'on la trouve ouvertement assumée chez certains auteurs (par exemple récemment chez Paraque et Willmott, 2014, p. 619), n'est pas exempte de danger. Outre qu'il est possible d'y déceler une forme de paresse académique quand elle est utilisée pour légitimer l'absence de travail empirique, cette fixation a pour biais le plus évident l'ignorance des formes de découplage probables qui séparent la conception des mécanismes étudiés de leur mise en œuvre effective (Clarke, 1984 ; Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014). Mais, même là où cette fixation ne va pas jusqu'à empêcher le travail d'enquête, elle tend à le cantonner à un nombre très restreint de processus, situations et espaces, typiquement les décisions stratégiques (Hernandez, 2006), les réunions d'associés (Ashforth et Reingen, 2014) ou encore les comités de direction (Cornforth, 2004 ; Michaud, 2014). L'intérêt jamais démenti pour l'assemblée générale, comprise comme expression archétypale du phénomène

démocratique au sein de l'organisation coopérative, constitue une bonne illustration de ce phénomène (Hernandez, 2006). Là encore, il ne s'agit pas de minimiser l'importance d'un rituel tel que celui de l'assemblée générale pour la construction de la réalité coopérative (Viggiani, 1997), mais simplement de rappeler qu'il n'en épuise pas, loin s'en faut, toutes les dimensions.

La nature du problème posé est donc en partie épistémologique. Il s'agit d'envisager la réalité de la coopération à un niveau plus micro que celui généralement rendu accessible par les travaux focalisés sur la gouvernance, c'est-à-dire à un niveau qui soit ancré dans l'expérience quotidienne des coopérateurs (Sennett, 2013[2012]). D'un point de vue méthodologique, cet objectif invite à favoriser les approches qualitatives, celles en particulier qui autorisent une enquête de terrain suffisamment longue et une proximité avec les acteurs permettant de développer une réelle familiarité avec les pratiques coopératives. Dans cette optique, les méthodes ethnographiques sont tout particulièrement indiquées (Atkinson *et al.*, 2001). Ensuite, en lien avec cette approche méthodologique, trois axes de recherche largement interdépendants me semblent susceptibles d'éclairer cet objectif d'une compréhension de la coopération telle qu'elle est réalisée en pratique : un axe principal, centré sur l'expérience quotidienne des relations de pouvoir, et que vise à saisir l'expression « contrôle, pouvoir et résistance » employée dans le titre de la thèse (Kokkinidis, 2014) ; et deux axes secondaires, reliés voire, dans mon esprit, subordonnés à cet axe principal, et centrés respectivement sur l'organisation concrète du travail (Hunt, 1992 ; Kokkinidis, 2014), et la mobilisation par les coopérateurs des outils de gestion (Bryer, 2011, 2014). Dans les paragraphes qui suivent, je développe plus avant chacun de ces trois axes.

Le premier des trois axes de recherche suggérés concerne la façon dont les relations de pouvoir imprègnent le quotidien de la coopération. En l'occurrence, ce domaine de recherche peut être considéré comme la déclinaison directe, et ce à un niveau plus micro, des problématiques de gouvernance coopérative. Sur le sujet du pouvoir, les recherches consacrées au mouvement coopératif français en sont en grande partie restées au constat négatif formulé à l'égard des expériences autogestionnaires de la fin des années soixante et des années soixante-dix (Georgi, 2003). Avaient alors été soulignées les dérives de pouvoir auxquelles l'absence de formalisation des rôles et des responsabilités inhérente à ces organisations était propice, faisant ainsi écho aux mises en garde très tôt formulées par Freeman (2013[1970]). Deux raisons justifient aujourd'hui de reconsidérer ces acquis. En premier lieu, les coopératives ont, dans leur majorité, tenu compte de ces enseignements et

assument désormais les tensions liées à la présence en leur sein d'un certain degré de formalisation, ce que résume par exemple bien la notion de « hiérarchies démocratiques » (Viggiani, 1997). En second lieu, les sciences de gestion ont depuis lors effectué des avancées considérables dans la compréhension des relations de pouvoir, ceci grâce au tournant subjectif opéré dans les années quatre-vingt-dix par l'introduction de la notion d'identité et l'attention aux activités les plus quotidiennes (Collinson, 1992 ; Jermier *et al.*, 1994). Ces avancées, d'abord conquises par l'étude d'entreprises classiques, ont su progressivement s'étendre au secteur public (Thomas et Davies, 2005) et aux organisations à but non lucratif (Joannidès, 2012), et il serait souhaitable d'en faire bénéficier le secteur coopératif, jusque-là tenu à l'écart de ce mouvement.

En retour, je m'attends également à ce que l'étude de structures coopératives, du fait par exemple de leurs natures hybride et démocratique, contribue à une meilleure compréhension des problématiques de pouvoir au sein des organisations, en mettant plus crûment en lumière certains aspects ou mécanismes moins visibles dans les structures classiques. A travers mon étude, mon objectif n'est donc pas simplement de contribuer à la littérature portant sur les coopératives et, à travers elle, aux littératures consacrées aux organisations hybrides, démocratiques ou alternatives. Il est plus largement de dialoguer avec les littératures gestionnaires portant sur les questions de pouvoir, aussi bien en théorie des organisations – on parle généralement de « pouvoir et résistance » (Jermier *et al.*, 1994 ; Fleming et Spicer, 2007 ; Courpasson et Golsorkhi, 2011) – qu'en contrôle de gestion – on parle aussi de « contrôle et résistance » (Hopper, 1986 ; Alawattage et Wickramasinghe, 2009). C'est à dessein que j'utilise, notamment dans le titre de la thèse, l'expression « pouvoir, contrôle et résistance » (Ezzamel *et al.*, 2001) afin d'éviter toute exclusive et relier mon travail aussi largement que possible aux apports issus de ces deux littératures.

Le deuxième des trois axes de recherche suggérés porte sur le travail. Plusieurs auteurs s'inquiètent avec raison des conséquences négatives que fait porter sur notre compréhension des organisations la relative mise à distance du travail qui caractérise certains courants de recherche dominants en gestion (Barley et Kunda, 2001) et également, à un niveau plus général, les processus de financiarisation en cours dans les économies développées (Gomez, 2013). La problématique essentielle contenue dans la coopérative de salariés, c'est celle de la coopération dans, au et par le travail. Le coopérateur est à la fois salarié et associé : une fois ses droits de propriété acquis et sa voix prise en compte, il lui reste encore à travailler, et c'est précisément cela qui commande au chercheur de dépasser la question de la seule



gouvernance. Ainsi que le souligne Grey (1996) à partir des réflexions de Simone Weil, la socialisation des moyens de production met certes fin à l'exploitation (l'appropriation de la valeur créée par d'autres que ceux qui la créent) mais elle n'abolit pas nécessairement l'oppression (la permanence de situations où le travailleur est traité comme moyen plutôt que comme fin en soi) : pour mémoire, le travail de l'ouvrier soviétique était dans maints secteurs productifs étroitement similaire à celui de ses collègues occidentaux, soumis qu'il était aux mêmes rigueurs tayloristes (Braverman, 1998[1974]). Le problème se pose dans les mêmes termes pour les coopératives : le dépassement de la division entre capital et travail offre une chance de repenser le travail mais ne garantit aucunement que cette chance soit effectivement saisie (Clarke, 1984 ; Kasmir, 1996 ; Le Loarne-Lemaire et Noel-Lemaitre, 2014). Il importe donc d'étudier la manière dont les valeurs et principes coopératifs investissent ou non le travail, son organisation comme son déroulement pratique, et ce à travers l'expérience vécue des coopérateurs, ou, pour le dire autrement, d'étudier dans quelle mesure la coopération réussit à actualiser, dans le cas du travail, les degrés de latitude offerts par son environnement économique (Hunt, 1992 ; Sabel, 1982). Le lien entre relations de pouvoir et travail apparaît bien ici comme un lien direct puisqu'il s'agit in fine d'apprécier dans quelle mesure le travail concrétise l'espoir de rééquilibrage des rapports de force porté par la coopération.

Le dernier des trois axes de recherche suggérés concerne la place des outils de gestion dans la coopération (Codello-Guijarro et Béji-Bécheur, 2015). Ce thème a à nouveau directement partie liée aux problématiques de pouvoir, contrôle et résistance, d'une part parce que les outils de gestion contribuent à stabiliser les relations de pouvoir (Strum et Latour, 1987), et d'autre part parce que leur influence sur la structuration des comportements au travail est désormais bien reconnue (Chiapello et Gilbert, 2013). Entre les pôles les plus extrêmes de cette problématique, incarnés d'un côté par le rejet des outils de gestion et des formes de managérialisation dont ils seraient porteurs (Hunt, 1992 ; ou pour un autre domaine Chiapello, 1994), et de l'autre par l'adoption littérale des outils de gestion issus des entreprises classiques (Maurel, 2008), existent des voies intermédiaires qui reposent sur une intégration créatrice des outils de gestion visant à les conformer aux spécificités coopératives (Bryer, 2014) voire sur le développement d'outils de gestion originaux (Gand, 2015). Ce domaine de recherche est encore très peu exploré (Codello-Guijarro et Béji-Bécheur, 2015 ; Barin Cruz *et al.*, 2014), et les études futures devront là aussi dépasser les limites déjà relevées à propos de la gouvernance, à savoir les tendances à focaliser l'effort de recherche sur les phases de conception des outils de gestion au détriment de leur réelle prise en main par les coopérateurs

et des nombreux processus de traduction susceptibles d'accompagner celle-ci, autant d'éléments certes plus difficiles, du point de vue du chercheur, à verbaliser.

### ***Structure de la thèse***

Afin de répondre aux enjeux que je viens de souligner, mon intention était de mener une étude de nature ethnographique portant sur une ou plusieurs coopératives de salariés. En préalable à ce travail de terrain, il m'apparaissait important de mener un travail approfondi de compréhension du contexte coopératif, en particulier des valeurs et principes qui le guident, de façon à me familiariser avec l'environnement dans lequel j'allais ensuite m'immerger. En complément d'un travail académique relativement classique de revue de la littérature existante sur les coopératives, ce travail préliminaire s'est matérialisé dans trois activités principales. En premier lieu, j'ai participé à divers séminaires et réunions organisés autour d'interventions de coopérateurs. En second lieu, je me suis impliqué avec une équipe d'enseignants-chercheurs de Grenoble Ecole de Management dans l'organisation en 2011 puis 2012 de deux séminaires de ce type, réunissant académiques et praticiens, et qui ont abouti à l'écriture d'un ouvrage collectif (Joannidès et Jaumier, 2014) et l'édition d'un numéro spécial de La Revue des Sciences de Gestion (Ansart *et al.*, 2014). En dernier lieu, j'ai occupé de fin 2011 à début 2013 une position de salarié-associé à temps partiel (environ deux jours par mois), dédié au suivi de la comptabilité, au sein d'une chocolaterie-pâtisserie coopérative nouvellement créée. Ces différentes activités m'ont permis de mieux appréhender les motivations et trajectoires des personnes engagées dans le mouvement coopératif ainsi que le sens qu'elles donnent aux valeurs et principes auxquels elles se réfèrent.

Le premier article de la thèse est le reflet de ce travail préliminaire et situe sa contribution dans les courants de recherche intéressés à la question du pluralisme. Il permet d'identifier les différents systèmes de valeurs susceptibles d'entrer en tension au sein du monde coopératif et fournit par conséquent certaines bases utiles à la compréhension ultérieure des enjeux de pouvoir, contrôle et résistance présents sur le site empirique soumis à l'enquête ethnographique. En effet, je cherche dans cet article à cartographier un espace coopératif relativement pluriel en étudiant la façon dont les valeurs et principes associés à la coopération peuvent être diversement interprétés par les coopérateurs. En m'appuyant sur les apports théoriques de la sociologie pragmatique française (Boltanski et Thévenot, 1991 ; Boltanski et Chiapello, 1999), et en les appliquant aux discours de coopérateurs mis en situation de justification, j'identifie quatre principes coopératifs vis-à-vis desquels les justifications et

critiques formulées par les coopérateurs varient significativement : le contrôle démocratique des membres, la participation économique des membres, la coopération entre les coopératives et l'engagement envers la communauté. Les relations de dépendance observées entre ces quatre principes m'amènent finalement à proposer une typologie des positionnements des coopérateurs, qui distingue respectivement un positionnement « pragmatique » (approche capitaliste, orientation vers le seul intérêt des membres et aspiration démocratique limitée), un positionnement « réformiste » (orientation vers le bénéfice de la communauté et la création de valeur sociale, aspiration démocratique plus poussée), et enfin un positionnement « politique » (opposition marquée au capitalisme et idéal autogestionnaire). Ces résultats me permettent de souligner plusieurs des apports de la sociologie pragmatique à la compréhension des réponses individuelles au pluralisme, apports qui viennent soit compléter, soit rectifier les travaux s'appuyant sur l'approche par les logiques institutionnelles. Premièrement, l'étude montre que, confrontés au pluralisme, les membres organisationnels ne construisent pas leurs réponses uniquement sur des affirmations positives de logiques mais y intègrent également des mobilisations négatives (critiques) d'autres logiques. Deuxièmement, l'étude souligne que le pluralisme ne réside pas simplement dans l'existence de plusieurs logiques mais également dans les différentes instanciations possibles d'une même logique, dont l'ambiguïté permet aux individus de sceller des compromis avec d'autres logiques. Troisièmement, en s'appuyant sur le concept d'instanciation, l'étude montre que les réponses individuelles au pluralisme impliquent souvent plus de deux logiques, qui se trouvent combinées dans des réponses globales articulant plusieurs positionnements interdépendants. Enfin, du point de vue cette fois de la littérature coopérative, l'étude propose une cartographie qui délimite de manière utile l'éventail des possibilités offertes aux coopérateurs dans leur interprétation des principes coopératifs, renforçant ainsi l'appréhension de la diversité du mouvement coopératif, des liens unissant les principes qu'il promeut, et des conflits de valeurs qui le traversent. Des versions précédentes de cet article ont été présentées successivement à Innsbruck en avril 2013 dans le cadre du *Society-Conventions-Organizations Workshop* organisé autour de Laurent Thévenot et Roger Friedland afin de faire dialoguer sociologie des conventions<sup>1</sup> et perspectives néo-institutionnelles, et à Montréal

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<sup>1</sup> Pour être tout à fait précis, c'est plutôt de sociologie de la justification ou de sociologie de la critique dont il faudrait parler ici dans la mesure où il est question, pour reprendre la classification opérée par Boltanski (1990), d'un régime d'action conflictuel au sein duquel les équivalences sont remises en cause. Par opposition à ce régime de justification, le régime des conventions décrit des situations pacifiques au cours desquelles les équivalences ne sont pas contestées (voir par exemple Gomez et Jones, 2000). En me référant quelque peu

en juillet 2013 au sein d'un séminaire de développement (*PDW*) organisé dans le cadre du *Colloque EGOS* et consacré aux cités et logiques institutionnelles. Suite à ce séminaire montréalais, un ouvrage dédié à la sociologie des conventions sera édité en 2016 pour la collection *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, dans lequel devrait être intégré cet article.

Les articles restants de la thèse reposent sur le travail ethnographique que j'ai mené par la suite, entre septembre 2013 et septembre 2014, au sein de Scopix<sup>2</sup>, une tôle-rie coopérative comprenant vingt-cinq salariés-associés. Ce travail m'a permis d'analyser sur le terrain un cas de mise en œuvre concrète des valeurs et principes étudiés dans le premier article de la thèse. Contrairement à la majorité des coopératives, Scopix n'est pas dirigé par un directeur général ayant un profil de manager professionnel, mais par un conseil de surveillance et un directoire composés principalement d'ouvriers. Mon observation participante, en tant qu'ouvrier affecté aux tâches les moins qualifiées, m'a permis de mettre en évidence deux caractéristiques saillantes de cette organisation : en premier lieu, la quasi-absence de pouvoir et d'autorité exercés par les responsables de la coopérative (membres du conseil de surveillance et du directoire, chef d'atelier, responsable technique, responsable commercial, etc.) ; et, en second lieu, le rejet par les coopérateurs des formes de gestion managériales et des outils de gestion. En conséquence de ces observations, je cherche dans les deux derniers articles de la thèse à analyser chacune des deux formes de contrôle dominantes mises en place par les coopérateurs pour garantir respectivement les bons fonctionnements démocratique et économique de la coopérative. Dans cette optique, les contributions académiques visées concernent cette fois le courant de recherche critique consacré aux formes alternatives d'organisation et, au-delà, plus généralement les littératures critiques s'intéressant aux phénomènes de pouvoir, contrôle et résistance.

Ainsi, j'étudie dans le deuxième article de la thèse les mécanismes mis en œuvre par les coopérateurs au quotidien afin d'éviter la concentration du pouvoir entre les mains de leurs responsables et par là même préserver le caractère démocratique de l'organisation. En m'appuyant sur les travaux de l'anthropologue Pierre Clastres sur les sociétés amérindiennes (Clastres, 1972, 1974, 1999[1977]), je montre qu'il s'agit essentiellement de mécanismes verticaux, en l'occurrence dirigés du bas vers le haut, et par lesquels les coopérateurs visent à

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abusivement à la sociologie des conventions à propos de situations relevant du régime de justification, je fais allégeance à la « convention » qui s'est désormais imposée dans la littérature organisationnelle.

<sup>2</sup> Il s'agit d'un pseudonyme.

« empêcher les chefs d’être des chefs » (Clastres, 1974, p. 186). Je relie ensuite ces résultats à la littérature organisationnelle afin de remettre en cause la vision dominante des concepts de pouvoir et de résistance, d'une part en contestant l'association trop systématique faite entre pouvoir et managers d'un côté et résistance et subordonnés de l'autre, d'autre part en soulignant la possibilité de formes de contrôle peu outillées et peu formalisées, et donc accessibles non plus au seul management. Des versions précédentes de cet article ont été présentées à Marne-la-Vallée en décembre 2013 (*Journée GESS*), Montpellier en avril 2014 (*Atelier Doctoral CMS*), Corfou en mai 2014 (*Organization Studies Summer Workshop*) et Paris en juin 2015 (*Colloque de l'AIMS*), ainsi qu’aux participants aux séminaires de recherche organisés respectivement par le laboratoire CORGies (Cardiff, novembre 2014) et par le CREG (Grenoble, juin 2015). L’article a également grandement bénéficié de mes interactions avec les membres de la faculté de Cardiff lors de mon séjour de doctorant invité entre septembre et décembre 2014 ainsi que des commentaires des éditeurs-en-chef de la revue *Organization*, à laquelle il a finalement été soumis en juin 2015.

Enfin, dans le troisième et dernier article de la thèse, j’étudie les formes de contrôle alternatives aux formes de contrôle managérial traditionnelles mises en œuvre par les coopérateurs afin d’assurer le bon fonctionnement économique de l’entreprise. En m'appuyant sur la littérature gestionnaire ancrée dans la sociologie des professions ainsi que sur les études critiques de la managérialisation (Grey, 1999 ; Parker, 2002 ; Reed, 1989), je montre que ces formes de contrôle sont cette fois basées sur des mécanismes tout autant latéraux (contrôle par les pairs) que verticaux et qu’elles font appel à l’éthique professionnelle attachée à une conception essentiellement artisanale (par opposition à des conceptions industrielle et managériale) du métier de tôlier. Ces observations m’amènent à proposer un cadre théorique permettant de mieux appréhender les formes de résistance à la managérialisation, ainsi qu’à avancer le concept d' « organisation contre le management » afin de caractériser des formes alternatives d'organisation qui rejettent ouvertement les principes managériaux, qu'ils soient de type bureaucratique ou culturel. Une partie des analyses développées dans cet article ont pris forme lors de mon séjour à Cardiff entre septembre et décembre 2014, où elles ont bénéficié de mes échanges avec les membres de la faculté. Une version précédente de l’article a été présentée à Athènes en juillet 2015 dans le cadre du *Colloque EGOS*, au sein d’un *track* dédié à l’organisation d’alternatives au capitalisme. Il sera prochainement soumis au numéro spécial de *M@n@gement* édité pour faire suite à ce *track* (Barin Cruz *et al.*, 2014).

Les pratiques observées chez Scopix me permettent ainsi de faire le lien avec le premier article de la thèse en montrant comment certains des positionnements identifiés au sein de la typologie proposée trouvent leur traduction dans les activités quotidiennes de coopérateurs et contribuent du coup à l'actualisation des relations de pouvoir au sein des coopératives. Plus globalement, mon étude confirme l'intérêt d'une approche centrée sur les pratiques quotidiennes plutôt que sur la gouvernance pour la compréhension des coopératives, ainsi que l'intérêt que peut constituer l'étude des coopératives pour la compréhension plus large des problématiques de pouvoir, contrôle et résistance au sein des organisations.

Dans les deux sections qui suivent, je développe plus amplement certains éléments liés à l'étude ethnographique de Scopix. Je propose tout d'abord une description approfondie du terrain étudié et développe ensuite une réflexion sur les enjeux méthodologiques associés à l'étude de ce terrain.

## **Ethnographie d'une coopérative : le site empirique**

### ***Choix du site empirique***

La recherche d'un site empirique approprié à mon étude s'est effectuée en partenariat avec une URSCOP. Un des critères fixés par mes soins était celui d'un effectif supérieur à 15-20 personnes, de façon à pouvoir observer des phénomènes de nature organisationnelle. Ce critère est déjà très discriminant dans la mesure où, si l'effectif moyen des SCOP est bien de 20 personnes, la majorité d'entre elles ne comprennent en fait qu'une poignée de salariés (CG-SCOP, 2015). Le principal critère fixé par l'URSCOP était que la coopérative concernée soit susceptible de retirer un bénéfice pratique de mon étude. Le croisement de ces deux critères a abouti à l'identification de trois terrains potentiels : une SCOP de nature industrielle opérant sur un marché régional (Scopix) ; une SCOP de nature industrielle opérant sur un marché international ; et enfin une SCOP engagée dans des activités de haute technologie sur un marché international. Suite à mes entretiens avec les directions de chacune des entreprises, trois raisons principales m'ont rapidement conduit vers Scopix<sup>3</sup>. En premier lieu, les deux autres coopératives présentaient, et ce de l'aveu même de leurs dirigeants, un fonctionnement peu différent de celui d'entreprises classiques. En second lieu, j'étais intéressé par le fait que les controverses se déployaient relativement librement chez Scopix, informations que je

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<sup>3</sup> Je précise que la piste de la coopérative opérant dans le domaine des hautes technologies s'est de toute façon rapidement fermée, la direction de l'entreprise n'étant pas intéressée par mon projet.

détenais du consultant spécifiquement en charge du suivi de cette coopérative au sein de l'URSCOP, et qui m'avaient été confirmées lors de mon entretien avec un des membres de la direction. Cette caractéristique, qui vient rappeler les mots de Willmott que j'ai placés en exergue, me semblait constituer un atout dans la mesure où je considérais alors le rôle de la critique (Bourguignon et Chiapello, 2005) au sein des organisations démocratiques comme un des points d'entrée possibles pour étudier le quotidien des coopérateurs, et ce selon chacun des trois axes d'enquête envisagés (relations de pouvoir, organisation concrète du travail et outils de gestion). En troisième lieu, d'un point de vue cette fois davantage méthodologique, je percevais déjà chez Scopix un degré d'ouverture et de transparence qui devait faciliter la collecte de données (voir plus loin, dans la section portant sur les aspects méthodologiques, la sous-section que je consacre aux conditions d'accès au terrain).

Deux précisions s'imposent à ce stade. La première est que l'étude d'un site empirique issu des nouvelles formes coopératives, les SCIC et CAE précédemment introduites, a longtemps fait partie des hypothèses envisagées dans la sélection de mon terrain. A travers les innovations démocratiques et sociales qu'elles mettent en œuvre (Boudes, 2014), ces coopératives présentent en effet des caractéristiques propices à déplacer le regard du chercheur et donc repenser la coopération. Cela dit, il me semblait que l'étude d'une coopérative plus classique (au moins en termes de statut) n'obérait en rien la possibilité d'une réelle contribution académique. En particulier, elle laissait intacte la possibilité de relever certains des défis que je me suis efforcé de souligner dans une des sections précédentes, défis qu'il est pour mémoire possible de résumer au nécessaire décentrage résultant du passage d'un niveau d'analyse centré sur la gouvernance à un niveau d'analyse centré sur les pratiques quotidiennes des coopérateurs. La seconde précision tient au fait que je ne m'étais pas préalablement fixé comme critère d'étudier un environnement ouvrier. Même si deux des trois sites initialement identifiés impliquaient effectivement cette coloration ouvrière, cela n'était pas le cas de la troisième coopérative, dont les activités de haute technologie se traduisaient par un environnement dominé par les ingénieurs et techniciens. Que les natures distinctes de ces terrains renvoient de fait à des traditions ethnographiques relativement séparées (Roy, 1959, Burawoy, 1979 ou encore Collinson, 1992 chez les premiers ; Kunda, 1992 ou Orr, 1996 chez les seconds) n'a en tout cas pas influé sur mon choix de terrain.

### ***Activités et marchés de Scopix***

Scopix est une tôlerie située en France et qui a acquis le statut de coopérative (SCOP) il y a une trentaine d'années. A cette époque, le patron de l'entreprise préexistante – au sein de laquelle la tôlerie ne constituait alors qu'une des trois activités principales – avait décidé l'arrêt des activités. Les ouvriers ont alors occupé l'usine pendant plusieurs semaines jusqu'à ce que leur soit finalement offerte la possibilité de reprendre l'activité sous forme coopérative. Après quelques années financièrement difficiles, au cours desquelles les employés travaillaient parfois sans rémunération pendant le week-end pour éviter la faillite, Scopix, désormais recentré sur la seule activité de tôlerie, s'est finalement trouvé en position d'accompagner l'un de ses clients dans son développement, renforçant ainsi progressivement son carnet de commandes et assurant sa rentabilité. Scopix compte désormais 25 salariés-associés et réalise un chiffre d'affaires annuel d'environ 2,5 millions d'euros, dans lequel le client à l'origine de son essor représente toujours près de la moitié des ventes. L'entreprise fournit principalement des boîtiers, coffrets et armoires destinés à l'industrie électronique ainsi que des pièces mécaniques variées qu'elle produit à partir de tôles fines d'acier, inox ou aluminium en se basant sur les plans fournis par ses clients.

Les clients intéressés par les grandes séries se reposent déjà sur des sous-traitants situés dans des pays d'Europe où la main-d'œuvre est moins chère<sup>4</sup>. En conséquence, le positionnement de Scopix sur le marché correspond à la livraison de petites et moyennes séries pour des clients locaux, c'est-à-dire à l'intérieur d'un rayon géographique d'environ 80 kilomètres. La réactivité, la flexibilité et le support de proximité constituent les principales attentes des clients sur ce segment de marché. Scopix s'y trouve principalement en compétition avec trois autres tôleries de la région, dont les tailles sont soit égale (dans un cas) soit environ deux fois supérieures (dans les deux cas restants) à celle de la coopérative. Les sous-traitants de Scopix (les opérations de peinture sont sous-traitées) ainsi que ses compétiteurs et clients sont dans leur intégralité des entreprises classiques, ce qui signifie que la coopérative est complètement immergée dans un environnement capitaliste.

Le chiffre d'affaires de Scopix est demeuré relativement stable sur les cinq dernières années mais une érosion du profit (incluant une perte sur l'exercice 2012-2013) a néanmoins été observée sur cette période. Celle-ci s'explique par des pressions baissières sur les prix apparues avec la crise économique depuis 2008. En particulier, cette tendance est bien visible

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<sup>4</sup> Les informations relatives au positionnement de Scopix présentées dans ce paragraphe sont issues d'un rapport de la CCI de 2010 et de rapports de l'URSCOP de 2012 et 2014.



dans la relation avec le client principal de Scopix qui, répercutant lui-même sur ses fournisseurs les pressions baissières exercées par ses propres clients, tend désormais à mettre Scopix plus systématiquement en concurrence et négocier plus sévèrement ses prix. La situation financière de la coopérative demeure toutefois saine à ce jour, les mises en réserve (elles représentent, statutairement, entre 40 et 50% du bénéfice annuel) ayant permis de constituer au fil des ans d'importantes réserves, qui se traduisent entre autres par une trésorerie conséquente.

### ***Eléments de gouvernance de Scopix***

Les statuts de la coopérative stipulent que les salariés deviennent normalement associés à l'issue de leur première année en CDI. A l'exception des quelques ouvriers sous contrat temporaire et d'un ouvrier en CDI à qui le statut d'associé a été refusé lors de la dernière assemblée générale, tous les salariés actuels sont associés<sup>5</sup>. L'entreprise est possédée à 100% par ses salariés, aucun support d'associés extérieurs ne s'étant jamais avéré nécessaire. Scopix fonctionne avec un conseil de surveillance – composé de trois membres élus par les associés pour une durée de six ans – et un directoire – composé de trois membres désignés par le conseil de surveillance parmi les volontaires et ce pour une durée de quatre ans. Les trois membres actuels du conseil de surveillance sont des ouvriers. Et tandis que le directoire précédent était composé de deux responsables (comptabilité et partie commerciale) et un ouvrier, le nouveau directoire désigné en 2013 est désormais composé majoritairement de personnes de l'atelier, un seul de ses membres partageant son temps entre des tâches de bureau (programmation pour les machines d'usinage) et l'atelier (usinage). Il est à noter que les membres du directoire ne laissent que très marginalement leurs activités de direction empiéter sur les attributions attachées à leur poste d'origine. Quelques réunions et discussions ad hoc viennent bien les détourner de temps à autre de leurs tâches habituelles, mais sans que la durée de ces interruptions n'excède généralement plus d'une demi-journée par semaine. Pour le reste, la réunion de directoire hebdomadaire débute chaque mardi à 17h, c'est-à-dire à l'issue de leur journée de travail, pour fréquemment se prolonger jusqu'à 19 ou 20 heures. Les membres du directoire touchent une prime mensuelle de 150 euros qui, le plus souvent, ne couvre même pas les heures supplémentaires effectuées dans ce cadre. Les activités associées au conseil de surveillance sont quant à elles bénévoles. Elles se limitent il est vrai à des

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<sup>5</sup> Toutes les informations communiquées dans ce paragraphe et les suivants, en particulier celles portant sur les âges, anciennetés et salaires, dépeignent la situation de Scopix à fin avril 2014.

apparitions espacées (de l'ordre d'une fois tous les trois mois) en réunion de directoire, et ce toujours à la demande expresse des membres de celui-ci.

Ces caractéristiques – en particulier l'existence d'un directoire composé d'associés peu familiers des problématiques de gestion, souvent d'ouvriers, et dont le mandat n'est généralement pas renouvelé – constituent un élément distinctif important au sein du monde coopératif. En effet, les coopératives d'une taille semblable sont en majorité dirigées par un directeur général, le plus souvent un manager professionnel dont le mandat est plusieurs fois reconduit (Bataille-Chedotel et Huntzinger, 2004). Les membres de Scopix sont bien conscients de cette particularité et y font souvent référence quand ils contextualisent leur environnement (voir également plus loin la section consacrée au regard des coopérateurs sur la thèse). La rotation des associés au niveau des organes de direction est une des facettes de l'inclination égalitariste qui caractérise Scopix, inclination égalitariste dont je détaillerai par la suite d'autres manifestations. En contrepartie, l'absence de professionnalisation des fonctions de direction entraîne une relative instabilité au niveau du conseil de surveillance et du directoire. Au renouvellement des associés caractérisant généralement les fins de mandat, s'ajoutent de fréquentes démissions, qui sont la conséquence de l'impréparation des associés aux tâches requises d'eux. Pour exemple, entre 1989<sup>6</sup> et 2005, seuls un tiers des membres du directoire ont mené leur mandat à terme. Une seule démission a été enregistrée depuis lors mais les doutes et difficultés exprimés par les membres du directoire actuel au cours de leur première année de mandat – dont j'ai été l'un des témoins privilégiés à travers ma participation hebdomadaire aux réunions de directoire – tendent à montrer que cette ère d'instabilité n'est pas tout à fait révolue. Sans doute parce que les exigences pesant sur ses membres sont bien moindres, le conseil de surveillance a été témoin d'un peu plus de constance sur ces mêmes vingt-cinq années. En particulier, et ce en contradiction avec la règle implicite de non-renouvellement des mandats, le doyen de Scopix, aujourd'hui seul salarié-associé restant à avoir participé à la création de la SCOP, a été de tous les conseils de surveillance. Néanmoins, abstraction faite de cet élément stabilisateur, près de la moitié des autres membres n'ont pas terminé leur mandat.

### ***Organisation de Scopix***

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<sup>6</sup> Avant 1989 et ce depuis la création de la coopérative au début des années quatre-vingt, la direction de Scopix était organisée autour d'un conseil d'administration.

L'Annexe A présente l'organigramme de Scopix, que j'ai anonymisé et légèrement simplifié afin d'en faciliter la compréhension. Les ouvriers, qui représentent l'essentiel de l'effectif, sont placés sous la responsabilité du chef d'atelier, qui rapporte lui-même au responsable technique. Les responsables comptable, commercial et technique répondent directement au directoire. De manière intéressante, chaque membre du directoire est chef (en tant que membre du directoire) de son propre chef (en tant que programmeur) voire du chef de son propre chef (en tant qu'ouvrier). Cependant, même si une structure hiérarchique est donc formalisée au sein de Scopix, il est important de noter que cette hiérarchie n'exerce dans les faits qu'une autorité très limitée et que chaque niveau de l'organigramme évolue donc de manière autonome vis-à-vis de sa ligne hiérarchique. C'est par exemple vrai des responsables comptable et commercial, dont les membres du directoire connaissent de toute façon assez mal les activités. C'est également vrai du chef d'atelier vis-à-vis du responsable technique, et plus largement des ouvriers vis-à-vis du chef d'atelier. Ainsi que je l'ai déjà mentionné, je développe plus avant cet aspect dans le deuxième article de la thèse et le présente alors comme une manifestation supplémentaire du caractère égalitariste de la coopérative.

Situé en périphérie d'une grande ville, Scopix est installé dans un bâtiment comportant trois étages : l'atelier est situé au rez-de-chaussée ; en plus d'importantes aires de stockage (palettes, produits finis ou semi-finis), le premier étage comprend la salle de réunion, la cuisine commune, les vestiaires ainsi que des sanitaires ; enfin, le deuxième étage est celui des bureaux. L'Annexe B offre un plan simplifié de l'atelier, qui s'étend sur une surface d'environ 1500 mètres carrés. Celui-ci est organisé en trois sections principales, respectivement (en suivant le flux des produits dans l'atelier) la découpe (poinçonnage et découpe laser), le pliage et enfin le soudage/assemblage. Les machines de découpe et de pliage sont réunies dans une même partie de l'atelier, plutôt ouverte, et suffisamment spacieuse pour permettre la circulation d'un chariot élévateur de type Fenwick. La section dédiée aux opérations de soudage/assemblage occupe l'autre extrémité de l'atelier, dans une zone cette fois découpée en boxes individuels. Ces deux parties de l'atelier sont reliées par une zone intermédiaire relativement disparate puisqu'elle comprend notamment le bureau du chef d'atelier, le poste de contrôle qualité, le magasin pour la quincaillerie, la zone de préparation pour les expéditions ainsi que la machine à café.

Trois types de profils dominent l'atelier. La section soudage/assemblage est le royaume des « tôliers », le terme utilisé pour désigner les soudeurs de métier. Ceux-ci ont généralement suivi un apprentissage adapté (ils sont typiquement titulaires d'un CAP de soudeur) et sont

classés sur une échelle qui va de P1 pour les moins expérimentés à P3 pour les plus doués d'entre eux, échelle qui reflète la complexité des affaires qu'ils sont capables de traiter. Les sections usinage et pliage sont celles des opérateurs machines. A la différence de la section soudage/assemblage, il n'est pas rare d'y trouver des ouvriers dont la formation et/ou l'expérience professionnelle antérieure ne sont pas liées à la tôlerie. La même échelle allant de P1 à P3 s'applique à ces ouvriers, reflétant là aussi leur maîtrise des machines et des affaires les plus complexes. Le troisième et dernier type de profils concerne les activités les moins qualifiées et valorisées, telles que l'ébavurage, le fraisage, le taraudage, le goujonnage ou encore la pose d'inserts. Ces activités, occupées par des ouvriers sans qualification spécifique, ne permettent pas de dépasser le statut de P1. La seule réelle possibilité d'évolution qui s'offre à ces ouvriers consiste à saisir une opportunité de bifurquer vers les sections usinage ou pliage.

La polyvalence est peu développée chez Scopix. Parmi les tôliers et opérateurs machines, seul un opérateur affecté en priorité à l'usinage travaille également de temps à autre au pliage. La dose de flexibilité requise par les variations de charge et de mix entre produits est en fait majoritairement assurée par les ouvriers les moins qualifiés. Bien que prioritairement affectés à un poste donné, ceux-ci s'attèlent fréquemment à d'autres tâches peu qualifiées (fraisage, taraudage, roulage, pose d'inserts, etc.) voire au poinçonnage ou au pliage de pièces simples, le réglage de la machine étant alors préalablement effectué par une personne qualifiée. N'ont donc pas cours chez Scopix les systèmes de rotation des postes observés dans d'autres coopératives et qui ont pour principal objectif de renforcer l'égalité entre les coopérateurs (Cornforth, 1995 ; Kokkinidis, 2014 ; Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). Les systèmes de rotation décrits par la littérature tendent à organiser non seulement un partage plus équitable des tâches les plus pénibles, mais favorisent également le développement personnel des coopérateurs en les formant à des activités parfois éloignées de leurs domaines de connaissance initiaux. Ceci leur permet de développer une compréhension plus aigüe du fonctionnement et des enjeux associés à leur organisation et se traduit in fine par une participation plus éclairée à la vie démocratique de la coopérative. A contrario, la rare mobilité observée chez Scopix ne vise qu'à gérer les absences et les déséquilibres temporaires dans les charges de travail. La répartition des tâches ne fait donc pas partie des divers domaines où se manifeste l'orientation égalitariste de Scopix, un constat qui, pour se comprendre pleinement, doit être relié aux aspects que je développe dans le troisième article

de la thèse, en l'occurrence la domination au sein de la coopérative d'une conception essentiellement artisanale des activités de tôlerie.

L'Annexe C donne des précisions sur les âges et anciennetés des salariés de Scopix. L'âge moyen est de 43 ans et les trois quarts des coopérateurs se situent dans la tranche d'âge comprise entre 35 et 54 ans. En ce qui concerne l'ancienneté, la moyenne s'établit à 14 ans. S'il ne reste plus aujourd'hui qu'un seul coopérateur à avoir participé à la création de la SCOP, trois autres coopérateurs affichent néanmoins une ancienneté supérieure à 30 ans. Dans son rapport daté de 2010, la CCI écrivait que Scopix présente une pyramide d'âge conforme au secteur des SCOP et légèrement plus favorable que celle affichée par le secteur de la métallurgie. Elle notait cependant que le vieillissement constitue un enjeu préoccupant pour Scopix à moyen terme et l'encourageait à recruter des moins de 30 ans, un objectif non tenu à ce jour dans la mesure où seuls deux salariés remplissent ce critère.

### ***Conditions de travail et culture de Scopix***

L'éventail restreint des salaires témoigne à nouveau de l'orientation égalitariste de Scopix, avec un écart d'à peu près un à deux entre, d'un côté, des ouvriers sans qualification récemment embauchés au niveau du SMIC et, de l'autre, le responsable technique, proche de la retraite, et seul cadre de la coopérative. Une enquête menée en 2013 auprès des SCOP de la région concernée relève des différentiels systématiquement plus élevés s'agissant de coopératives de taille comparable et comprenant à la fois des ouvriers et cadres. L'écart entre le salaire moyen et le salaire médian se trouve ainsi limité chez Scopix à une centaine d'euros. Dans le même ordre d'idée, la participation aux bénéfices n'est pas calculée au prorata des salaires (comme c'est là encore souvent le cas dans les coopératives) mais distribuée à parts égales. Le rapport de la CCI réalisé en 2010 indiquait des rémunérations légèrement supérieures à celles du secteur. Les ouvriers font eux état, en se référant à des exemples précis (offres d'entreprises concurrentes, comparaison avec des connaissances travaillant pour d'autres entreprises du secteur), de salaires inférieurs à ceux du marché. En définitive, il semble que les salaires de base des ouvriers de Scopix (c'est encore plus vrai des salaires des personnels de bureau, limités par les pressions égalitaristes) sont effectivement inférieurs à ceux du marché, mais que la participation (entre 40 et 50% du bénéfice annuel) et la rémunération des parts sociales (entre 0 et 20% du bénéfice annuel) contribuent, les années où les résultats financiers sont satisfaisants (le complément de revenu va alors jusqu'à dépasser

les 5 000 euros par associé), à hisser leurs revenus bien au-delà de ceux offerts sur des postes équivalents par le marché.

La durée de travail hebdomadaire est chez Scopix de 35 heures. Cette durée est répartie sur quatre jours et demi pour le personnel de bureau, avec des horaires flexibles. Elle est répartie sur quatre jours pour le personnel de l'atelier, avec des horaires cette fois fixes, de 7h à 17h avec une pause entre 12h et 13h15. La plupart des ouvriers ne travaillent pas le vendredi, quelques-uns ne travaillent pas le lundi (deux ouvriers) ou encore le mercredi (à nouveau deux ouvriers), suivant en cela un calendrier qui cherche à la fois à accommoder les souhaits des ouvriers et les contraintes de la production. Issu d'un accord collectif, un système introduisant des semaines hautes (4 heures supplémentaires travaillées sur la journée habituellement non travaillée) et basses (arrêt du travail à 16h au lieu de 17h) permet de moduler les horaires en fonction de l'activité, et ce jusqu'à 12 semaines par an (6 semaines hautes, 6 semaines basses). Les opérateurs des sections usinage et pliage sont également susceptibles, sur la base du volontariat et en échange d'une prime négociée au coup par coup (100 euros par semaine dans les cas que j'ai observés), de travailler en deux-huit en cas de pic d'activité : ils travaillent alors 7 heures par jour sur cinq jours (soit de 6h à 13h, soit de 13h à 20h).

La tôlerie est une activité physiquement exigeante dans la mesure où elle requiert de travailler le plus souvent debout ainsi que la manutention de pièces lourdes et encombrantes. De nombreux ouvriers, même parmi les plus jeunes, présentent en conséquence des problèmes de dos. Certaines activités impliquent des postures pénibles (pliage, fraisage, etc.) ou exposent à des vibrations (poinçonnage, taraudage, ébavurage, etc.). Le bruit, couramment situé selon le médecin du travail entre 85 et 90 décibels voire au-delà à proximité de la poinçonneuse, constitue une contrainte supplémentaire que le port des bouchons et casques n'atténue que partiellement. La saleté de l'air résultant de l'émission des poussières de métal lors de l'ébavurage et du meulage représente également une source de pénibilité importante à laquelle le port d'un masque n'offre qu'une réponse elle-même très contraignante. La vétusté du bâtiment rend la régulation de sa température problématique, dégradant un peu plus les conditions de travail durant les périodes extrêmes (exposition au froid et courants d'air sur certains postes en hiver, chaleurs extrêmes pour les soudeurs et certains postes situés directement sous les tôles en été). Enfin, la répétitivité caractérise certains postes dès lors que les ouvriers s'y attèlent à de moyennes séries (ébavurage, fraisage, taraudage, goujonnage, pliage, etc.).

A ces facteurs de pénibilité s'ajoute la dangerosité de certaines tâches, telles que le meulage ou encore le pliage, où un des ouvriers s'est coupé l'extrémité d'un doigt durant ma présence sur le terrain. A l'exception des chaussures de sécurité dont le port est généralisé, chaque ouvrier choisit de manière relativement autonome de suivre ou non les prescriptions relatives aux divers équipements de protection individuelle (gants, lunettes, bouchons d'oreille, masques). Si ces libertés prises avec la sécurité sont en priorité justifiées par des raisons de confort (le masque qui rend la respiration difficile) et des contraintes d'efficacité (les gants qui empêchent d'évaluer les états de surface), s'y mêlent également des éléments de mise à distance des risques encourus qui découlent de la culture masculine de l'atelier (Collinson, 1999). La coopérative ne comprend que deux associées, toutes deux dédiées à des tâches administratives. Tous les ouvriers sont donc des hommes et l'absence de mixité constitue ainsi une autre caractéristique de l'atelier<sup>7</sup>. La culture masculine qui en résulte (Collinson, 1992) est encore renforcée par l'origine des travailleurs qui, pour nombre d'entre eux, proviennent de pays d'Europe du sud ou d'Afrique du nord (Italie, Portugal, Espagne, Algérie, Tunisie), pays où l'identité masculine revêt une importance encore plus marquée qu'en France (Willis, 1981[1977]).

Les coopérateurs se montrent dans l'ensemble plutôt satisfaits de leurs conditions de travail. Les aspects dont ils disent le plus souffrir ont partie liée aux fortes tensions opposant certains associés ou groupes d'associés (voir également plus loin la section portant sur les difficultés principales rencontrées sur le terrain), à la permanence des conflits de valeurs sur lesquels ils sont amenés à prendre position et aux incertitudes auxquelles les expose la fragilité de leur hiérarchie. Il est donc pleinement question ici de l'« insécurité existentielle » associée à l'expérience de la « nature intrinsèquement morale de la réalité sociale » à laquelle fait référence Willmott pour qualifier les organisations démocratiques (Willmott, 1993, p. 534). Les coopérateurs reconnaissent en contrepartie apprécier l'autonomie dont ils bénéficient dans leur travail. Les ouvriers, en particulier, sont conscients d'évoluer dans un environnement beaucoup moins contrôlé que celui qui a cours dans les entreprises classiques, et d'adopter des rythmes de travail plus humains que ceux auxquels doivent se plier les autres ouvriers du secteur. Le même genre d'autonomie déjà constaté dans le cas de la sécurité se retrouve en effet dans la conduite du travail, les ouvriers s'autorisant à limiter la pénibilité de leurs tâches

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<sup>7</sup> Les coopérateurs se rappellent d'une femme qui a travaillé à la découpe il y a plusieurs années mais n'est restée que quelques mois. Pendant ma présence sur le terrain, une très jeune stagiaire (moins de 18 ans) a également passé plusieurs semaines dans l'atelier.

par des pauses relativement fréquentes, des discussions entre collègues ou par l'adoption d'un rythme qu'ils définissent eux-mêmes. L'absence d'horaires postés structurels et la semaine de quatre jours (même si elle se traduit par des journées de travail plus longues) sont également très prisées. Les membres de Scopix établissent un lien direct entre ces divers avantages et la nature coopérative de leur organisation. La possibilité de fumer sur son poste de travail, dont usent presque la moitié des coopérateurs, illustre bien la relation, qu'elle soit seulement supposée ou bien réelle, entre ce genre de latitudes et la coopération. En effet, alors que je manifestais, lors de mon premier jour de terrain, mon étonnement vis-à-vis de cette liberté, l'ouvrier avec qui je travaillais me répondit (tout en me montrant l'emplacement de son cendrier pour le cas où j'en aurais l'usage) sans avoir à réfléchir plus avant : « ça, c'est parce que c'est une SCOP ».

En conséquence de la balance plutôt positive qu'ils établissent entre ces divers aspects de leur travail chez Scopix (gouvernance démocratique, rémunérations, conditions de travail), les coopérateurs tendent à rester fidèles à leur organisation, ce dont témoigne l'ancienneté moyenne assez élevée (14 ans). A l'exception d'un cas lié à des tensions entre coopérateurs, les quelques départs auxquels j'ai pu assister pendant ma période de terrain sont avant tout justifiés par des raisons familiales (rapprochement géographique) ou une volonté de reconversion professionnelle. Cette situation pourrait néanmoins rapidement évoluer si les compléments de salaire représentés par la participation et les dividendes (considérés par les ouvriers comme si indispensables pour leur procurer un niveau de vie décent, au cœur d'une zone périurbaine où le coût de vie est effectivement relativement élevé) venaient à structurellement faire défaut et le marché du travail à se détendre. En effet, l'attachement des membres de Scopix à leur coopérative ne fait pas pour autant d'eux des militants du mouvement coopératif, et ce malgré la force de la culture égalitariste évoquée à plusieurs reprises. A la création de Scopix, la forme coopérative s'est avant tout présentée aux salariés comme un moyen de conserver leurs emplois plutôt que d'affirmer une conception particulière de l'économie voire de la société. Ainsi que l'ont mis en évidence Varman et Chakrabarti (2004) dans leur étude d'une coopérative indienne de nettoyage, le militantisme est très souvent un luxe hors de propos pour les coopérateurs les plus modestes. Chez Scopix, la culture très égalitariste, la présence de pratiques autogestionnaires et l'accord partagé sur le fait qu'il vaut mieux travailler pour soi plutôt que pour un patron cohabitent avec une quasi-totale absence d'idéalisme et des pratiques traduisant parfois le pragmatisme le plus cru. Les processus de recrutement, pourtant vus par la littérature comme essentiels à la réalisation de



l'alchimie particulière aux organisations hybrides (Battilana et Dorado, 2010), illustrent bien la chose : les éventuelles dispositions à la coopération des candidats ne jouent aucun rôle chez Scopix, qui recherche avant tout un bon soudeur ou un bon opérateur machines.

Après avoir fourni dans cette section de plus amples éléments sur le site empirique au centre de mon travail ethnographique, je développe dans la section à venir des éléments relatifs à la méthodologie utilisée.

## **Ethnographie d'une coopérative : éléments méthodologiques**

### ***Statut au sein de la coopérative***

Ma place au sein de l'atelier était assimilable à celle d'un stagiaire non rémunéré<sup>8</sup>, travaillant à trois-quarts temps et affecté de manière flexible (en fonction des congés, absences non planifiées, surcharges de travail ponctuelles, etc.) aux différents postes exigeant le moins de compétences. J'ai démarré par le travail considéré comme le plus basique dans l'atelier, à savoir l'ébavurage (polissage des pièces à l'aide d'une ponceuse ou d'un touret à meuler), puis progressivement occupé d'autres postes tels que le fraisage, le taraudage et la pose d'inserts ou de goujons. Il m'était également possible de travailler sur la poinçonneuse ou une presse-plier à la condition que le réglage soit préalablement effectué par un ouvrier qualifié. Dans les faits, le pliage est rapidement devenu une de mes affectations les plus fréquentes dans la mesure où j'y faisais preuve de moins de maladresse qu'à d'autres postes et témoignais, qui plus est, d'une affinité non feinte pour cette activité.

En complément de ma présence dans l'atelier, mon statut de 'doctorant-chercheur' (le libellé officiel utilisé dans le contrat rédigé à la hâte par mon institution dans les jours précédant mon arrivée chez Scopix et destiné à me couvrir en cas d'accident), me permettait également d'assister à autant de réunions que je le souhaitais. En particulier, j'étais systématiquement présent aux réunions :

- hebdomadaires du directoire, réunions qui se déroulent chaque mardi soir après la journée de travail, et au cours desquelles les trois membres du directoire traitent les principaux problèmes de la coopérative, prennent certaines de leurs décisions et reçoivent les coopérateurs qui souhaitent exprimer leurs griefs ;

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<sup>8</sup> Le directoire m'a néanmoins remis 100 euros en liquide à Noël (un montant équivalent aux chèques-cadeaux reçus par les coopérateurs à cette occasion) ainsi qu'un chèque de 1500 euros à mon départ en reconnaissance de ma contribution.

- mensuelles qui réunissent le directoire et les différents responsables ;
- annuelles que constituent les Assemblées Générales.

En plus de ces réunions régulières, j'assistais également, en fonction de leur intérêt prévisible pour mes recherches, à un certain nombre de réunions ponctuelles : réunions de section visant à l'amélioration de la qualité, entretiens individuels organisés par le nouveau directoire au début de son mandat afin d'obtenir des retours des associés sur leurs priorités, réunions ad hoc visant à solutionner un problème ponctuel, etc.

En dehors des heures de travail, la pause du midi constituait un moment privilégié pour échanger avec les coopérateurs et les observer dans un cadre autre que celui strictement professionnel. Je prenais chaque jour mon repas dans la cuisine commune située au-dessus de l'atelier, dans laquelle pouvaient parfois se rassembler jusqu'à une dizaine d'ouvriers. C'est dans ce contexte qu'il m'était notamment donné d'appréhender les positionnements politiques des coopérateurs, les informations télévisées diffusées par un vieux poste en noir et blanc offrant une vitrine sur le contexte socio-économique propice aux discussions à caractère politique. J'étais aussi régulièrement invité aux barbecues organisés devant l'usine pendant les mois les plus chauds et qui réunissaient toujours les cinq ou six mêmes ouvriers.

En revanche, les contacts avec mes collègues en dehors de l'usine ont été relativement rares. En dehors du repas annuel financé Scopix, ceux-ci se sont limités à un après-midi barbecue-pétanque-bière avec cinq autres ouvriers et à d'épisodiques sorties nocturnes avec deux ouvriers célibataires. Le caractère restreint de ces activités extra-professionnelles trouve son explication à la fois dans la vie casanière privilégiée par certains membres de Scopix, en particulier ceux disposant d'une famille, et dans la limitation de leurs activités à des cercles de connaissances assez fermés pour les autres (voir également plus bas mon commentaire sur les cliques).

### ***Evolution de mon statut sur le terrain***

Mon projet de terrain était initialement vague et s'est en fait précisé au-cours des premières semaines passées chez Scopix. Lors de mes rencontres initiales avec les représentants du directoire, j'avais proposé, en contrepartie de mon accès au terrain, d'apporter à la coopérative une assistance sur des sujets sur lesquels j'avais pu acquérir des compétences dans mes expériences professionnelles précédentes : contrôle de gestion, gestion de production ou encore utilisation de l'ERP (récemment installé chez Scopix mais sous-

exploité). Cette contrepartie me paraissait non seulement nécessaire à l'augmentation de mes chances d'accès au terrain mais aussi m'offrir la possibilité d'étudier des aspects intéressants du fonctionnement de la coopérative. L'idée que j'avais alors avancée était d'être présent deux jours par semaine chez Scopix, un jour occupé à travailler au service de la coopérative et le second complètement dédié à mes recherches. J'avais par ailleurs exprimé la volonté de passer mon premier mois à travailler à temps plein dans l'atelier comme ouvrier afin de me familiariser avec les métiers, processus et produits de la coopérative.

Ces premières semaines passées dans l'atelier m'ont rapidement convaincu que c'était là qu'il me serait possible d'étudier les éléments les plus intéressants du fonctionnement de la coopérative. J'ai donc obtenu l'accord du directoire pour travailler à trois-quarts temps dans l'atelier, en l'occurrence les lundi, mercredi et jeudi. A cause des heures d'assistance de recherche dues à mon institution, un plein temps aurait été trop difficile à assumer mais ma participation le mardi soir à la réunion de directoire me permettait néanmoins d'être présent à l'usine les quatre jours de la semaine. Mon travail non rémunéré dans l'atelier était considéré, tout au moins par le nouveau directoire, comme une contrepartie satisfaisante à mon accès au terrain et les activités de support relatives à la gestion initialement envisagées se sont ainsi limitées à des interventions très ponctuelles (par exemple, l'aide apportée à la responsable comptable dans la révision d'un support Powerpoint dans le cadre de la préparation de l'AG annuelle).

Rétrospectivement, cet ajustement des modalités de ma présence sur le terrain m'apparaît essentiel à la pertinence et la richesse des données finalement collectées. Une des caractéristiques de l'atelier (et plus largement de Scopix) est son refus de la gestion ou plus précisément de la formalisation de celle-ci au moyen d'outils de gestion. Le seul artefact auquel est reconnue une certaine légitimité est le plan technique à partir duquel l'ensemble des coopérateurs travaillent. Pour le reste, les pourtant rares charges administratives demandées aux ouvriers (le remplissage sur une feuille orange des quantités produites et temps passés) restent, à quelques exceptions près, lettre morte. Ce rejet de l'outillage a ses avantages en tant qu'il permet aux coopérateurs de contester l'assignation des responsabilités en cas de problème, éviter la stabilisation de certains rapports de force ou encore bénéficier de marges de manœuvre pour renégocier les attendus de leur travail (voir Strum et Latour, 1987). C'est aussi vrai des bureaux où l'absence de compte-rendu permet là encore de s'affranchir des décisions verbalement actées pendant les réunions ou de les renégocier, préservant ainsi cette même flexibilité dans les rapports intersubjectifs. Le risque pour l'apprenti-ethnographe

(en particulier celui dont la perspective est saturée par l'horizon gestionnaire) était évidemment de voir un manque là où s'exprime avant tout un refus. En effet, Scopix se définit sans doute mieux comme une organisation contre la gestion plutôt que comme une organisation sans gestion (ou avec une mauvaise gestion). Dans ce contexte, construire une observation participante sur la mise en place d'outils de gestion aurait à la fois présenté des difficultés méthodologiques et abouti à des résultats de nature probablement assez différente de ceux rapportés par mon étude.

Ces éléments contextuels, liés à la nature du site empirique étudié, expliquent ainsi pourquoi, des trois enjeux précédemment dépeints comme majeurs pour l'étude des coopératives par les sciences de gestion, à savoir respectivement le quotidien des relations de pouvoir, la nature du travail et les outils de gestion, seuls les deux premiers sont effectivement traités dans les articles de la thèse, le troisième n'apparaissant en définitive qu'en creux, c'est-à-dire à travers le rejet dont les coopérateurs gratifient les orientations gestionnaires. Plus largement, ma position d'ouvrier au sein de la coopérative m'offrait la possibilité d'ancrer mes travaux dans une longue et déjà très riche tradition ethnographique (Roy, 1959 ; Burawoy, 1979 ; Delbridge, 1998 ; Lupton, 2003[1963] ; Kondo, 1990). Même si les études d'atelier basées sur l'observation participante ont probablement connu leur acmé avec le courant de la *Labour Process Theory* (e.g. Burawoy, 1979), les nouvelles formes de travail propres aux sociétés post-industrielles entraînant notamment un déplacement du regard ethnographique vers le secteur des services (Smith, 2001), cette tradition reste encore bien vivante, ainsi qu'en témoignent par exemple les travaux récents de Korczynski (2011). A ma connaissance, c'est la première fois qu'un travail de ce type était mené au sein d'une coopérative de salariés.

### ***Conditions d'accès au terrain***

Si les conditions d'accès au terrain sont révélatrices du groupe étudié (Geertz, 1973 ; Favret-Saada, 1977), je me dois de confesser que mon accès à Scopix a été particulièrement aisé. Il m'a été rapidement accordé, malgré le projet très vague présenté à l'époque, après un seul entretien avec l'un des membres du directoire qui a immédiatement validé la décision auprès des deux autres membres de celui-ci. Et alors que je m'inquiétais de la possibilité pour les membres du nouveau directoire – il avait été désigné juste après l'obtention de ce premier accord mais avant que j'aie effectivement démarré mon étude de terrain – de remettre en cause cette décision prise par leurs prédécesseurs, ils ont eux aussi sans difficulté réitéré cet accord à l'issue d'une brève rencontre.

Ainsi que je l'ai précédemment indiqué, le militantisme est quasi-absent chez Scopix et il serait donc faux d'interpréter cet acte d'ouverture comme un moyen de promotion du modèle coopératif. Une fois l'hypothèse du prosélytisme écartée, celle de la mise à disposition d'une force de travail gratuite apparaît déjà comme plus convaincante pour expliquer l'accord des directoires. Mais là encore, cette hypothèse ne me semble acceptable qu'à condition qu'elle ne vienne pas obscurcir une raison à mon sens beaucoup plus fondamentale, à savoir l'état de quasi-totale transparence offert par Scopix et donc l'absence d'un possible motif de refus tel qu'aurait pu lui en fournir la volonté de préserver une certaine opacité sur son fonctionnement<sup>9</sup>. Si les membres du directoire ne savaient peut-être qu'assez confusément quel intérêt ils avaient à accepter ma proposition, ils savaient en tout cas encore moins pour quel motif ils auraient dû la rejeter.

Au cours de ma présence sur le terrain, la participation à aucune réunion, même sensible (par exemple l'attribution d'un avertissement à un associé), ne m'a jamais été refusée et, très souvent, j'étais aimablement informé en cas de réunion organisée de manière impromptue. Les entretiens individuels organisés par le nouveau directoire constituent à ce titre une excellente illustration : malgré le fait que des informations à caractère personnel y étaient discutées, tous les salariés ont accepté ma présence et seul un d'entre eux a préféré que l'entretien ne soit pas enregistré<sup>10</sup>. Quand j'exprimais ma surprise à l'égard du fait que ma présence était si facilement acceptée, la réaction la plus fréquente était : « on a rien à cacher ici ! ».

Dans le même ordre d'idée, les difficultés habituelles des premiers pas sur le terrain – méfiance des ouvriers, risque d'être perçu comme au service de la direction, etc. (Korczynski, 2011) –, généralement soulignées dans les publications à l'usage des apprentis-ethnographes, m'ont été épargnées. J'ai dans un premier temps été étonné de devenir aussi facilement le réceptacle de ce qui me paraissait être des confidences assez rares, avant de rapidement me rendre compte que ce dont on me rendait si généreusement témoin n'avait en fait rien de particulièrement secret et était au contraire connu ou, tout au moins, à la disposition de tous, responsables aussi bien qu'ouvriers.

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<sup>9</sup> Significativement, c'est moi et moi seul qui ai abordé les questions de confidentialité. Je me suis également engagé à anonymiser mes travaux sans que la demande en ait été formulée.

<sup>10</sup> Si l'ouvrier concerné avait dans un premier temps bel et bien hésité à autoriser ma présence, il s'agissait dans son esprit bien plus de protéger le fragile ethnographe que de lui dissimuler quelque réalité inavouable. Il avait en effet promis un « grand déballage » et me considérait apparemment comme trop tendre pour y être confronté.

Ces éléments d'ouverture propres à Scopix, tels que rendus apparents par l'analyse rétrospective des conditions d'accès au terrain, ont en soi une valeur explicative. Pour Scott (1990), plus les formes de domination exercées par les dominants sur les dominés sont totalisantes et plus elles contraignent les dominés à donner des gages publics de soumission et à parallèlement cantonner leurs actes de résistance à la sphère privée. A contrario, la faible distance qui sépare chez Scopix les comportements et discours privés des comportements et discours publics – dans les termes de Scott le *hidden transcript* du *public transcript* – et le fait que les formes de résistance déployées par les coopérateurs – et analysées dans le deuxième article de la thèse – sont ouvertes (*overt*) plutôt que secrètes (*covert*) peuvent donc se lire comme les indices des limites raisonnables dans lesquelles les coopérateurs réussissent à circonscrire les formes de domination auxquelles ils sont soumis.

Avant même le démarrage de mon étude, j'avais fixé la durée de ma présence sur le terrain à une année, ce dont le contrat passé avec Scopix porte la trace. Une autre solution possible aurait consisté, plus soupagement, à décider du terme à donner à ma présence sur le terrain en fonction d'un critère de saturation dont j'aurais cherché à évaluer l'atteinte au fur et à mesure de la progression de ma collecte de données (Neyland, 2008). Dans mon esprit, il s'agissait en tout cas de ne pas effectuer une ethnographie trop courte, de celles que la profession affuble parfois du qualificatif de 'jet-plane ethnography' (Bate, 1997), mais au contraire d'une durée qui puisse être jugée satisfaisante au regard des critères couramment appliqués dans les disciplines où l'ethnographie occupe une position centrale, à savoir l'anthropologie et la sociologie. Rétrospectivement, il m'apparaît qu'une durée d'environ six mois se serait avérée suffisante pour développer les interprétations présentées dans les articles de la thèse, mais sans que je dispose alors tout à fait de la même pléthore d'illustrations contribuant à renforcer ma confiance en leur justesse. C'est aussi au cours de mes tous derniers mois de terrain que j'ai, la fatigue et la lassitude aidant, commencé à ressentir de manière plus aigüe les duretés de la vie ouvrière, saisissant de mieux en mieux la signification profonde attachée à un rituel tel que celui qui veut que l'ouvrier réponde « comme un lundi » au « salut, ça va ? » qui lui est adressé le lundi par ses collègues (sous-entendu « c'est reparti pour une dure semaine »), et « comme un jeudi » à celui qui lui est adressé le jeudi (sous-entendu « on tient le bon bout »). Le passage d'une année complète sur le terrain ne m'autorise évidemment pas à présumer de ce qu'est la condition ouvrière, une caractéristique de cette condition tenant précisément au rétrécissement des futurs possibles de l'ouvrier au seul horizon de l'atelier (Sabel, 1982), mais il m'a au moins permis de m'imprégner de certains des effets liés à

l'exercice sur la durée d'un travail très pénible. J'ai continué, une fois mon travail de terrain terminé, à me rendre régulièrement chez Scopix (tous les deux mois environ), à la fois pour récupérer des documents complémentaires, communiquer certains éléments de mon travail et obtenir le retour des coopérateurs sur ceux-ci (voir plus loin la section consacrée au regard des coopérateurs sur la thèse), mais aussi plus généralement pour entretenir les liens amicaux tissés pendant l'année écoulée et me tenir informé de l'évolution de la situation de l'entreprise, qui me tient désormais à cœur.

### ***Collecte de données***

Mes données consistent principalement en des notes de terrain (*fieldnotes*) que je passais de deux à trois heures à l'issue de chaque journée de travail à réunir dans un journal (*diary*) électronique. Ces notes de terrain étaient elles-mêmes basées sur des notes mentales (*headnotes*), c'est-à-dire mes souvenirs des événements et discussions de la journée, ainsi que des observations griffonnées (*jotted notes*) sur un petit carnet lorsque cela était possible, certains travaux comme le poinçonnage offrant du temps libre pendant le cycle d'opérations de la machine (Emerson *et al.*, 1995). Pendant les réunions organisées suffisamment à l'avance, je me munissais de mon ordinateur portable pour pouvoir directement taper mes notes.

Ces notes de terrain (environ 500 000 mots) contiennent essentiellement des descriptions de mes propres activités et des événements observés, ainsi que des transcriptions des discussions tenues au cours de la journée, complétées par des détails précisant les attitudes des coopérateurs impliqués. Même si je me suis rendu compte à leur relecture qu'on y trouve peu d'éléments caractérisant par exemple l'environnement sonore, olfactif ou même visuel dans lequel se déroulaient les activités, événements observés ou discussions rapportées, cette absence ne fait pas réellement problème dans la mesure où la lecture des notes me suffit (tout au moins pour le moment) à faire ressurgir ces éléments de contexte.

A cela s'ajoutent :

- près de 300 photos de qualité inégale, prises avec mon téléphone afin soit d'illustrer certaines scènes, en particulier celles mettant en jeu des artefacts, soit simplement de garder une trace synthétique de la géographie des lieux et des postes de travail ;
- une vingtaine d'enregistrements (non transcrits à ce jour) des entretiens individuels organisés par le nouveau directoire suite à son entrée en fonction ;

- une dizaine d'enregistrements sonores portant sur les bruits de l'atelier, dans le cadre d'une étude plus systématique du phénomène sonore à laquelle je me suis attelé pendant mes derniers mois de terrain ;

- et enfin une cinquantaine de documents papier (plans de l'atelier, historique des conseils de surveillance et directoire, grille des salaires, impressions de courriels internes, copies de notes de service, de rapports d'études effectués par l'URSCOP ou la CCI, etc.).

Alors que j'avais également prévu, dans le cadre de l'étude mentionnée précédemment, de réaliser des entretiens visant à mieux comprendre les pratiques sonores des ouvriers, en particulier leur usage de la radio, j'ai rapidement abandonné cette idée, mon unique tentative en ce sens ayant mis en évidence les limites de l'exercice. Alors que je pouvais pourtant à ce stade de mon travail de terrain quasiment revendiquer un statut de natif, l'artifice associé à la situation d'entretien était venu rappeler à mon interlocuteur que j'étais avant tout un doctorant-chercheur et l'effet d'imposition en résultant avait de manière visible altéré la nature de notre dialogue (Bourdieu, 2007[1993]). J'ai pu par la suite, et cela sans trop de difficulté, collecter les données voulues en simplement conversant avec les ouvriers, ceci sans avoir à solenniser ces instants et sans même avoir à nécessairement les informer de la finalité de mes questions.

### ***Difficultés principales rencontrées sur le terrain***

Dans un contexte où l'atelier est organisé sous formes de cliques de trois ou quatre personnes, cliques le plus souvent en conflit les unes avec les autres et uniquement reliées entre elles par l'entregent d'une minorité de *brokers* (au sens de la théorie des réseaux sociaux), la principale difficulté qu'il me fallait gérer concernait le dosage du fragile équilibre entre neutralité et engagement vis-à-vis de mes différents collègues afin de ne pas m'interdire l'accès à telle ou telle clique par la fréquentation trop assidue de telle autre. Témoignent de cette difficulté les reproches essuyés de temps à autre, qu'il s'agisse d'une remarque désabusée et formulée presque agressivement par un premier ouvrier pour faire suite à ma participation à une sortie nocturne (« alors comme ça tu sors avec les deux autres neuneus !? »), ou bien encore des accusations portées par un second ouvrier selon lesquelles ma présence aux barbecues valait pour approbation de la consommation excessive d'alcool qui s'y donnait à voir.

De semblables qualités de diplomatie s'avéraient tout autant nécessaires pour naviguer entre les différentes tentatives d'instrumentalisation vers lesquelles cherchaient à m'entraîner certains responsables. Dès l'une des toutes premières réunions à laquelle j'avais assisté, le



responsable commercial avait voulu me prendre à témoin du rythme de travail insuffisant des ouvriers<sup>11</sup> (« lui qui travaille dans l'atelier, il a bien vu le monsieur hein ? »), ce sur quoi j'avais prudemment évité de me prononcer en présence du chef d'atelier (« je ne peux pas dire, ça ne fait pas assez longtemps que je suis ici... »). J'avais d'ailleurs senti ce dernier se tendre sur sa chaise, prêt à intervenir en cas d'acquiescement de ma part, et il n'en aurait sans doute pas fallu plus en l'occurrence pour me couper presque définitivement de l'atelier. A l'opposé, cette réponse m'avait d'un seul coup gagné la confiance forte utile – et jamais démentie par la suite – du chef d'atelier.

Mais à côté de cette sorte de neutralité visant à ménager mes relations avec les différentes cliques composant l'atelier aussi bien qu'avec les différents responsables, il me fallait également cultiver une autre forme de neutralité qui avait cette fois pour objectif de laisser les coopérateurs développer leurs discours et leurs pratiques sans risquer de les entraver en leur opposant d'autres formes de discours et de pratiques. Et c'est évidemment dans cette optique que le travail ouvrier m'apparaissait plus indiqué que le conseil en gestion. Mais là aussi les pièges – auxquels je n'ai pas toujours su échapper – étaient bien réels, en particulier celui de me figer dans une passivité bienveillante dont le caractère quelque peu fabriqué était parfois susceptible d'indisposer les coopérateurs. Ainsi, une fois où j'avais laissé le collègue près de qui je travaillais débiter les pires propos machistes sans lui apporter de contradiction, un second collègue s'était ému de mon absence de réaction : « eh ben dis donc, t'es pas contrariant toi... ». Une autre fois encore, alors qu'on avait sollicité mon avis sur une question de gouvernance à l'issue de l'AG, mon refus de me prononcer (« je n'ai pas d'avis sur la question ») avait été accueilli avec un dépit évident par un responsable (« eh ben c'est bien dommage ! »).

En dehors de ces difficiles dosages, c'est mon incapacité à assurer certaines tâches – même non qualifiées – au sein de l'atelier (Linhart, 1981[1978]) qui a constitué au cours des premières semaines de terrain ma difficulté principale, me faisant un moment craindre d'être considéré comme inutile et donc indésirable dans l'atelier. Une fois cette crainte surmontée – le processus de production n'est en définitive pas avare de tâches à la portée d'un enfant, ainsi que pourraient en témoigner les éphémères stagiaires issus des collèges voisins et que Scopix trouvait à employer à décoller des films de protection ou détacher des pastilles –, ce sont ensuite mes erreurs (« se piner » dans le langage natif) qui ont constitué tout au long du travail

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<sup>11</sup> Le rythme « café-clope » dans ses propres termes.

de terrain mes sources de stress les plus répétées, ces erreurs pouvant générer des rebuts (et donc des pertes financières) importants tout autant que des retards de livraison chez les clients.

### *Analyse des données et écriture ethnographique*

J'ai dans mes analyses systématiquement accordé la priorité aux données issues de mes observations directes des pratiques des coopérateurs sur celles recueillies plus à froid à travers mes conversations avec ceux-ci. Dans leur étude ethnographique d'une coopérative de consommateurs, Ashforth et Reingen notent par exemple que 'participants often asserted the importance of cooperation and lamented the ongoing conflict but in the next meeting were observed initiating further conflict' (Ashforth et Reingen, 2014, p. 482). J'ai été fréquemment amené à observer des décalages (*disjunctures*) de ce type et il était donc important de ne pas laisser ce que les coopérateurs disent obscurcir ce que les coopérateurs font. Cette observation renvoie à un certain nombre de problématiques déjà bien identifiées dans la littérature sur le rapport de l'ethnographe à ses informateurs (*informants*) (Sherman Heyl, 2001). Elle contribue également à souligner à nouveau (voir déjà ma remarque précédemment formulée sur la situation d'entretien dans la section dédiée à la collecte de données) les limites et spécificités des recherches qualitatives reposant sur les seuls entretiens (Alvesson, 2003).

Afin de conserver une certaine spontanéité à mon récit, j'ai décidé de ne procéder à aucun codage systématique des données collectées. Au contraire, j'ai choisi de m'appuyer sur les méthodes d'écriture ethnographique promues par Emerson, Fretz et Shaw dans le cadre des traditions interactionniste et interprétative (Emerson *et al.*, 1995, p. xi-xii) afin de produire un récit thématique (*thematic narrative*) centré sur les notes de terrain et où l'histoire est thématisée analytiquement, mais de façon relativement souple (Emerson *et al.*, 1995, p. 170). Dans cette optique, j'ai pris pour point de départ les observations que je considérais les plus révélatrices et édité les extraits des notes de terrain correspondantes. J'ai ensuite proposé des interprétations de leur signification et les ai progressivement reliées à d'autres observations illustrant le même phénomène, générant in fine une séquence de « blocs thématiques comportant descriptions et commentaire analytique » ('thematically organised units of excerpts and analytic commentary') (Emerson *et al.*, 1995, p. 170)).

Mon objectif était avant tout de produire un récit convaincant, c'est-à-dire un récit qui remplisse les objectifs d'authenticité, de plausibilité et de criticalité (Golden-Biddle et Locke, 1993). J'ai recherché l'authenticité, c'est-à-dire 'convey[ing] the vitality of everyday life

encountered by the researcher in the field setting' (Golden-Biddle et Locke, 1993, p. 599), en exposant clairement dans le récit mon statut au cours du travail de terrain ainsi que mon implication dans les événements rapportés. J'ai visé la plausibilité, c'est-à-dire la connexion avec des problématiques d'intérêt pour les chercheurs en théorie des organisations, en reliant mes résultats empiriques à la littérature consacrée aux questions, successivement, de pouvoir et de résistance (deuxième article) et de managérialisation (troisième article). Enfin, je me suis efforcé d'atteindre la criticalité, c'est-à-dire 'the ability of the text to actively probe readers to reconsider their taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs' (Golden-Biddle et Locke, 1993, p. 600), en montrant comment des perspectives anthropologiques, en particulier celle de Pierre Clastres à travers son travail sur les sociétés amérindiennes, conduisaient à la possibilité de nouvelles interprétations autour de ces littératures.

### ***Eléments d'épistémologie et de réflexivité***

En conformité avec la tradition ethnographique, mon approche peut être qualifiée d'interprétative (Denzin et Lincoln, 2005). Il s'agissait effectivement pour moi de donner sens aux activités des membres de Scopix pour in fine proposer une interprétation de leur culture (Geertz, 1973). Mon travail pouvait se résumer à tenter d'apporter une réponse à la question suivante : qu'est-ce qui définit l'appartenance (*membership*) au groupe étudié (Neyland, 2008) ? C'est la sensibilité anthropologique qui dans ce contexte me tenait lieu de boussole : 'An anthropologist goes in and tries to have as few prejudices as possible and be as open as possible to where the world leads you' (The New York Times, 2012). C'est ainsi que Scott la définit pour la démarquer de celle qui prévaut dans d'autres disciplines – en l'occurrence celle où il officie lui-même, les sciences politiques, mais la remarque vaut pareillement pour la sociologie et a fortiori les sciences de gestion. Cette aspiration tout autant éthique que scientifique m'a conduit à refuser de rejeter comme des anomalies les pratiques à première vue incompréhensibles ou bien manifestement déviantes qui s'offraient à mon observation voire requéraient ma complicité. En m'astreignant à expliquer pourquoi les coopérateurs font ce qu'ils font, j'étais au contraire amené à rationaliser, mais le plus souvent sous une forme étrangère à la rationalité gestionnaire, leurs pratiques. Dans le débat qui oppose Asad à Gellner (Asad, 1986), j'ai ainsi pris le parti du premier et donc d'un « fonctionnalisme relativiste » – c'est-à-dire d'une attention poussée au contexte social permettant de redonner cohérence aux faits observés – qui assume le risque de « bienveillance excessive » (*excessive charity*) vis-à-vis des natifs contre lequel Gellner met en garde. Il ne s'agissait évidemment

pas d'exclure la possibilité que les membres de Scopix puissent de temps à autre agir de manière incohérente mais d'affirmer que ces incohérences mêmes devaient, pour pouvoir être interprétées comme des incohérences, être préalablement rapportées à un ensemble cohérent de pratiques dont le travail interprétatif donnait la clef.

C'est cette même perspective anthropologique qui m'a conduit à privilégier le concept de culture sur celui d'identité, à insister sur ce qui unifie les pratiques au sein de Scopix plutôt que ce qui les différencie, à rechercher au-delà des oppositions entre les différentes cliques ou entre l'atelier et les bureaux ce qui fait communauté. C'est donc bien une culture que j'entendais décrire, et non pas une (voire des) contre- ou sous-culture(s) ouvrières(s) qui viendrait(en)t, comme c'est le cas dans la plupart des ethnographies d'atelier (e.g. Collinson, 1992), s'opposer à la culture dominante incarnée par le management. Car ce n'est qu'en recontextualisant Scopix dans son environnement plus large qu'on peut éventuellement commencer à parler de contre- ou sous-culture pour qualifier ce qui s'y joue (Ackroyd et Crowdy, 1990). En particulier, j'insiste sur le fait que le travail visant à empêcher les chefs d'être des chefs occupe tout autant les locataires des bureaux que les ouvriers et que la mise à distance des valeurs managériales ne s'arrête pas, elle non plus, à la porte de l'atelier.

Enfin, pour étudier cette culture, je ne m'interdisais pas et pour ainsi dire cherchais même activement à devenir natif (Favret-Saada, 1977). La maîtrise des codes sociaux que j'avais acquise en grandissant dans un milieu semblable (père ouvrier, milieu modeste) à celui qu'il me fallait désormais étudier constituait en cela un atout. Si j'ai pu à certains moments me reprocher (ou me voir reprochés) mes manques d'intérêt pour la mécanique, le bricolage et encore bien d'autres dissonances (par exemple de géographie sociale : « tu viens des beaux quartiers toi ! » ; sans même faire mention de l'espèce de luxe asymétrique offert par la certitude que mon terrain n'était qu'un terrain dont j'avais à chaque instant la possibilité de me dégager), il n'en restait pas moins que l'habitus ouvrier ne m'était pas étranger et que cela a certainement facilité certains aspects de mon processus de socialisation au sein de Scopix.



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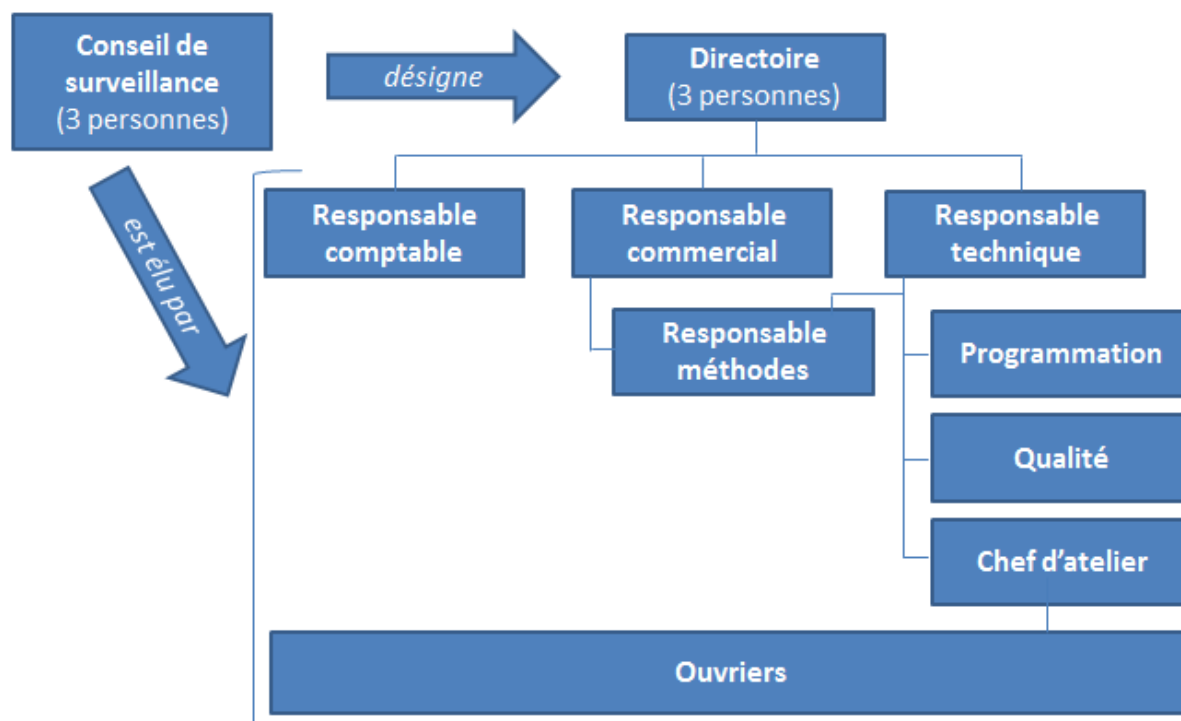
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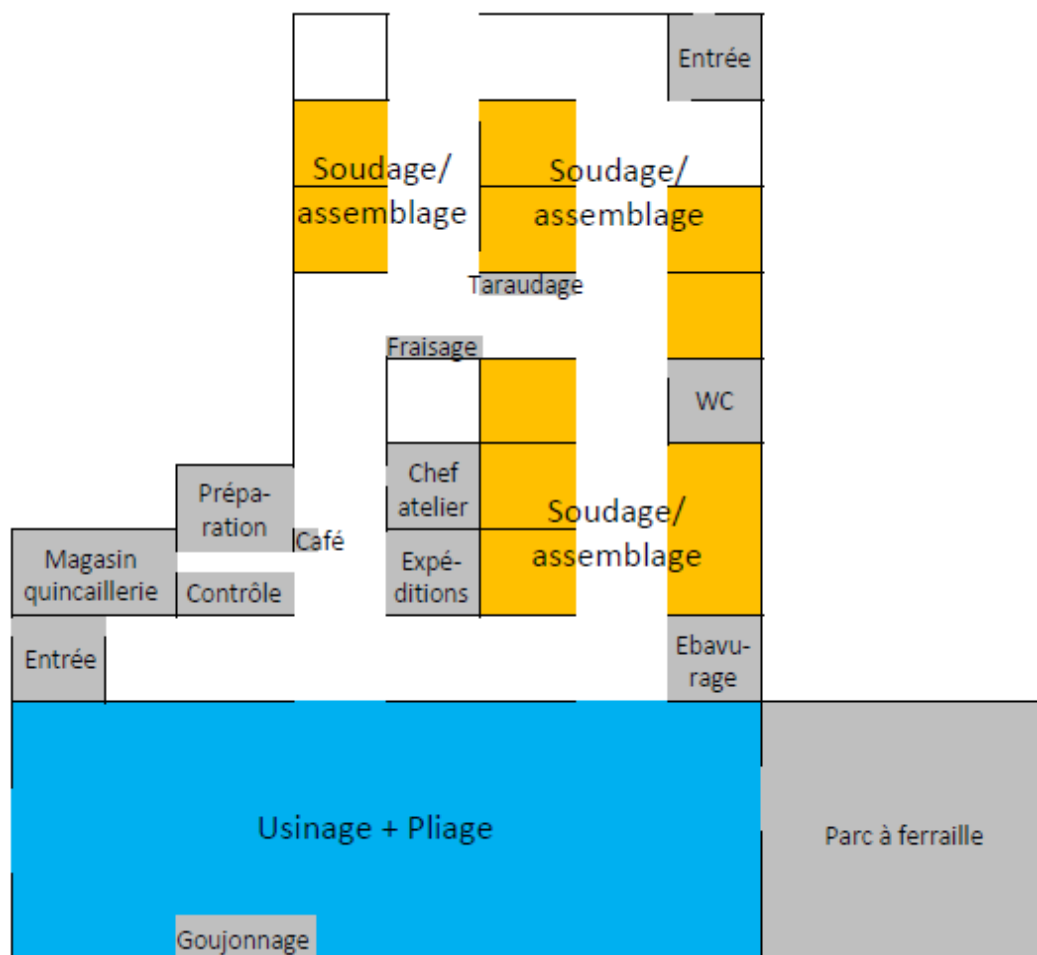


## Annexe A : Organigramme simplifié de Scopix





## Annexe B : Plan simplifié de l'atelier de Scopix

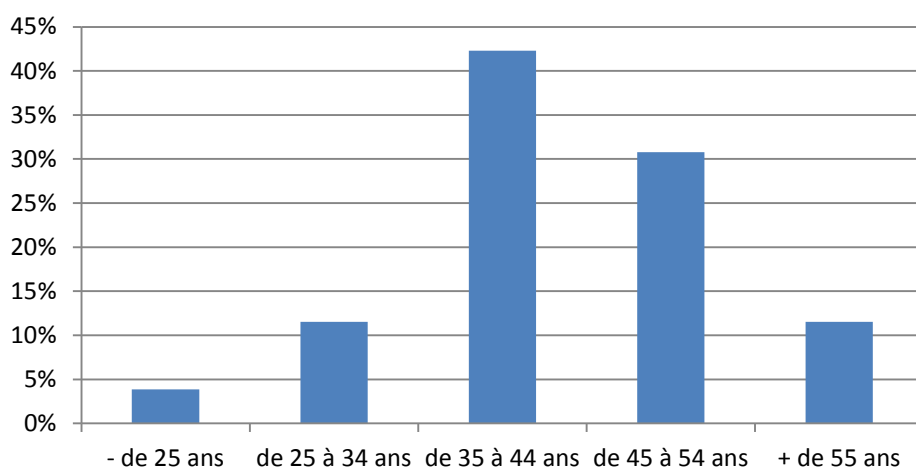




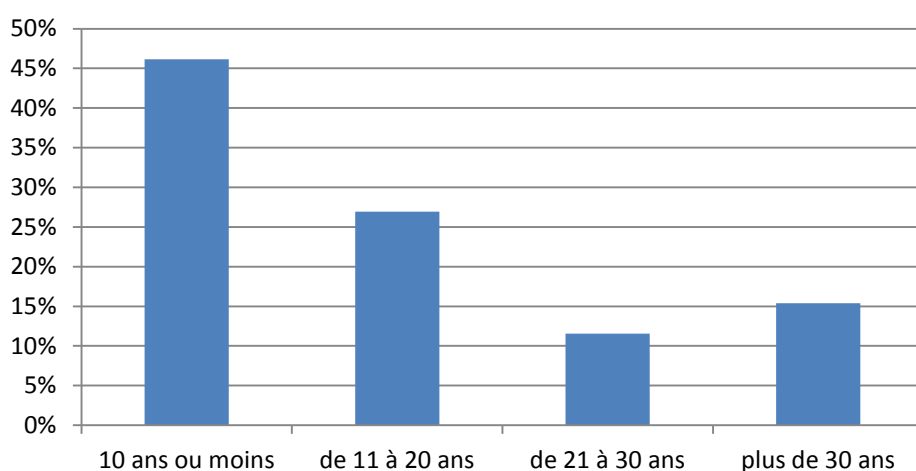


## Annexe C : Ages et anciennetés des salariés de Scopix

**Graphe 1 : Répartition par âge**



**Graphe 2 : Répartition par ancienneté**





# **PREMIER ARTICLE**



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### **Co-operatives, compromises and critiques: What do French co-operators tell us about individual responses to pluralism?**

**Abstract:** The purpose of our paper is to contribute to the further understanding of how individuals deal with pluralism by studying the various instantiations they construct based on a shared set of diverse principles. Drawing on theoretical insights from the sociology of conventions, we look at the various modes of justification publicly advanced by French co-operators when substantiating their positions towards co-operative principles. Our analysis allows us to identify three main instantiations of co-operation: pragmatic, reformist and political. Our contribution to the understanding of pluralism and its instantiations by organizational members is threefold. First, and in contrast with studies drawing on an institutional logics perspective, our study shows that individual instantiations of pluralism do not rely on positive affirmations of logics only but also rest on critical mobilizations of competing logics. Second, our study shows that pluralism can be understood not only as having multiple logics, but also along different possible instantiations of the same logic, the ambiguity of which allows compromises to be settled with other logics. Third, drawing on the concept of instantiation, we suggest that organizational members' responses to pluralism often involve more than two logics, which are combined into a complex set of interdependent positions. In addition, in relation to co-operatives studies, our proposed typology provides a mapping that usefully delineates the range of possibilities found in co-operators' interpretations of co-operative principles, thus furthering our understanding of the diversity of the co-operative movement together with that of the links between co-operative principles.

**Keywords:** Pluralism, sociology of conventions, compromise, critique, worker co-operatives



*'What is wealth, what is worth? We speak about added value but without dealing with the question of wealth as such. And what is wealth today? To what do we grant wealth?'*

*Co-operative bank representative*

## **Introduction**

Pluralism may sound as if it is evidence for organizational members, most organizations being depicted as increasingly exposed to multiple, often conflicting, principles of evaluation (Kraatz and Block, 2008; Stark, 2009). This is true for private corporations, whose primary objective of profit has been challenged by demands for corporate social responsibility, as measured by triple bottom-line approaches (Gray, 2002). This is true as well for public administrations, whose traditionally dominant concern for citizens' welfare has been challenged by the introduction of New Public Management, together with its concerns for efficiency and methods borrowed from the private sector (Diefenbach, 2009; Sinclair, 1995). However, this observation has only recently permeated new institutionalism (Greenwood et al., 2011; Pache and Santos, 2010). Indeed, although neo-institutionalist scholars have shown a growing interest in the question of pluralism, *i.e.* the possibility that distinct evaluative principles coexist, limited understanding of the way organizational members respond to such pluralism has actually been gained to date (Greenwood et al., 2011; Pache and Santos, 2010). The main reason for this paradoxical outcome is that, while acknowledging the presence of multiple evaluative principles at the societal level (Cloutier and Langley, 2013; Rojas, 2010), most research stances have tended, for a long time, to consider the field an intermediate level that operates as a filter between society and organizations/individuals, thus leaving the latter quite untouched by the question of pluralism.

The institutional logics perspective provides the most salient example of such an approach (Thornton et al., 2012). Indeed, it primarily situates the stakes of pluralism at the interplay between society, which in its Western forms includes a plurality of value spheres or so-called 'institutional orders' (Friedland and Alford, 1991), and a given field, in which a single dominant institutional logic is usually said to govern (Thornton and Ocasio, 1999). When two logics concomitantly populate a field, it is then conceived of as a transitory period of conflict, the formerly dominant logic being progressively displaced by a newly dominant one, for



instance as reported in the editing industry, with the shift from a professional to a market logic (Thornton and Ocasio, 1999), and in French cuisine, with *Nouvelle Cuisine* taking over from *Cuisine Traditionnelle* (Rao et al., 2003). And when, by accident, two logics come to coexist over a long period of time, geographic segregation contributes then to letting organizations and individuals be unaffected by pluralism (Lounsbury, 2007).

Within the institutional logics perspective, a growing number of studies, though, have come to progressively challenge this prevalent consensus by showing that: (1) two logics were sometimes able to inhabit a field over long periods of time (Reay and Hinings, 2009), for example the care and scientific logics in medical education (Dunn and Jones, 2010), and the aesthetic and efficiency ones in architecture (Thornton et al., 2005); (2) a field could be populated by more than two logics at the same time (Greenwood et al., 2010), thus prompting the reference to constellations (Goodrick and Reay, 2011) or pools of these – Goodrick and Reay (2011), for instance, notice within the field of pharmacy a concomitant influence of professional, corporate, market and state logics –; and (3) modes of interaction between field logics other than conflict and competition were also possible, featuring complementarity and mutual support as a possible outcome of field pluralism (Greenwood et al., 2010). These findings have had strong implications for organizations and organizational members, which, under these circumstances, no longer appeared shielded from the effects of pluralism, thus paving the way for studying the kinds of responses they articulate when confronting it (Almandoz, 2014; Besharov and Smith, 2014; Greenwood et al., 2011; Pache and Santos, 2010). The nascent literature on individual instantiations of pluralism that resulted from this move has so far offered contrasted results, endowing organizational members with more or less agency to leverage institutional logics strategically or to actualize logics on the ground (Bullinger et al., 2015; McPherson and Sauder, 2013; Pache and Santos, 2013a; Smets et al., 2015). As a consequence, it is still unclear how individuals practically deal with pluralism. With the aim of further unleashing the avenue opened by these recent contributions, we choose to turn to a different theoretical stance, which, because of its extended conception of pluralism, may bring promising insights in our understanding of this phenomenon.

The sociology of conventions has developed a vision of pluralism based on the empirical observation of the argumentative resources that actors mobilize when they engage in public justifications (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999, 2006). In such situations, actors actually rely, when articulating their claims, on a limited number of so-called ‘orders of worth’, each

featuring a singular definition of the common good. All orders of worth being simultaneously available to actors, pluralism is no longer conceived of as a transitional issue to be eventually solved but rather as inherent to any social situation (Cloutier and Langley, 2013; Daudigeos and Valiorgue, 2010). It is because actors are equipped with critical capacities that they are able to deal with the social inherence of pluralism and the ever-present ambiguity this entails. They do this by deciding on the order of worth that should prevail in a given situation, articulating critiques and justifications accordingly and, when needed, settling compromises (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999, 2006). We here contend that such premises offer a strong avenue for furthering our understanding of how individuals construct situated instantiations of pluralism. More specifically, drawing on the premises of the sociology of conventions, we will pay attention to the role of critiques and compromises in these instantiations.

Although pluralism can in this sense be understood as a concern for any setting, hybrid organizations, *i.e.* those whose identity is built on differentiated principles, still constitute a favoured object of study for pluralism since they proactively strive to compromise between multiple principles (Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Pache and Santos, 2013b). Co-operatives, which seek by definition to link an economic principle with a social one, are such an example of hybrid organizations (Leca et al., 2014; Webb and Cheney, 2014). Interestingly, co-operatives provide an additional level at which pluralism can be analysed, the co-operative movement having elaborated on a shared set of values and principles to orient co-operators' grasp of co-operative spirit (Birchall, 1997; ICA, 1995). Co-operatives thus offer a privileged position from which to understand how organizational members may articulate different responses to a shared set of principles.

More specifically, our empirical setting is French worker co-operatives. In line with the sociology of conventions, the collected data relate to a situation in which representatives of such co-operatives were in a position to publicly justify and respond to criticism about the way they conceive of co-operative values and principles. The analysis of these data through the lens of the sociology of conventions allows us to identify three main instantiations of co-operative principles. The *pragmatic* co-operator pursues market objectives with the aim of contributing first and foremost to member benefit. The *reformist* co-operator integrates broader society concerns within a reformist critique of capitalism. The *political* co-operator advocates a new model of society with a radical critique of capitalism.

Our contribution to the understanding of individual responses to pluralism is threefold. Our contribution to the understanding of pluralism and its instantiations by organizational members is threefold. First, and in contrast with studies drawing on an institutional logics perspective, our study shows that individual instantiations of pluralism do not rely on positive affirmations of logics only but also rest on critical mobilizations of competing logics. Second, our study shows that pluralism can be understood not only as having multiple logics, but also along different possible instantiations of the same logic, the ambiguity of which allows compromises to be settled with other logics. Third, drawing on the concept of instantiation, we suggest that organizational members' responses to pluralism often involve more than two logics, which are combined into a complex set of interdependent positions. In addition, in relation to co-operatives studies, our proposed typology provides a mapping that usefully delineates the range of possibilities found in co-operators' interpretations of co-operative principles, thus furthering our understanding of the diversity of the co-operative movement together with that of the links between co-operative principles.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. The next section situates the current problematic around pluralism and introduces the theoretical framework. We then describe the methodology followed, presenting the choice of the empirical setting, and the process of data collection and analysis. The penultimate section presents the results, and the final section then discusses the contributions of the study and draws conclusions.

### **Individual responses to pluralism and the sociology of conventions**

In this section, we summarize extant knowledge about organizational members' responses to pluralism and current gaps in this knowledge, so as to introduce our research question (first sub-section). We then justify the choice of the sociology of conventions as our theoretical framework and substantiate its main related concepts (second sub-section).

#### ***Individual responses to pluralism***

Research perspectives on organizational members' responses to pluralism can be broadly classified along two dimensions (see Table 1). First, approaches differ in the degree of actualization of logics on the ground, the two extremes consisting in the use of ready-made logics on one side and in the idiosyncratic instantiation of logics to fit the situation on the other side. Second, approaches also vary in the extent to which they endow individuals with

the ability to play with logics strategically. In this case, the two extremes describe either fully agentic individuals or imprinted ones whose behaviors are pretty much dictated by institutional logics. These two dimensions are helpful to categorize current works on individual responses to pluralism and lead to distinguishing three stances. Within the first stance, individuals are considered mere carriers of logics (Almandoz, 2014). In this view, which is not totally unrelated to Bourdieu's notion of habitus, the orientation of an individual towards a given logic primarily reflects her past socialisation and trajectory (Battilana and Dorado, 2010; see also Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013: 218–219 on imprints of institutional conditions on individuals). According to the second stance, individuals are endowed with the capacity to strategically engage with various logics, be it within specific work situations (McPherson and Sauder, 2013) or throughout a life-long career (Bullinger et al., 2015). Under this perspective, logics then resemble tools, which actors can selectively mobilise depending on their needs. Finally, within the last stance, the same idea is again present according to which an actor may engage with various logics depending on the situation that she has to deal with. But this time, logics, rather than being out there, fully ready for an actor's use, get only constituted through practice (Smets et al., 2015; Smets and Jarzabkowski, 2013; Voronov et al., 2013). Under this perspective, logics are better seen as incomplete vehicles, whose contents and functions are ultimately realised when practically appropriated by actors. Or, to say it otherwise, logics are inhabited (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006).

\*\*\*\* Insert Table 1 about here \*\*\*\*

Our categorization of these emergent research stances on individual responses to pluralism reveals a great diversity of approaches, which leaves many aspects of the phenomenon still unclear. In an exploratory fashion aimed at challenging such approaches and better circumscribing issues at stake in the debate, we thus propose the introduction of the sociology of conventions as an additional perspective from which to study this question.

### ***The sociology of conventions as a new approach to individual responses to pluralism***

Under the lead of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, the sociology of conventions has developed as part of the broader stream of French pragmatic sociology (Guggenheim and Potthast, 2012; Scott and Pasqualoni, 2014). In their seminal work, *On Justification* (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006), the authors are interested in situations where the normal

course of collective action is momentarily suspended to let actors reflexively engage in a public work of justification. The authors' empirical observations show that, in such situations, actors actually rely, when articulating their claims, on a limited number of orders of worth. Boltanski and Thévenot (1999; 2006) identify six such orders of worth, whose grounding paradigms can be found in seminal works of Western political philosophy. Each of these orders of worth (also referred to as a 'world') is coloured with moral elements, since it features a singular definition of the common good. We now provide a brief description of each of these orders of worth.

In the inspired world, worth is granted to creativity, as instantiated by artistic activities. The domestic world insists on the local anchoring of people governed by relationships of dependence, as is the case, for example, with the traditional family. The world of fame attributes worth to recognition in the public sphere, being worthy being synonymous with being famous or popular. The civic world emphasizes collective interest, together with the notions of equality and solidarity, as embedded by democratic principles. The market world values tradable goods and services, worth being granted to those who can afford fulfilling their aspirations for highly priced resources. Lastly, the industrial world praises efficiency, and grants worth to the competence of experts assisted by measurement tools. Although these two last orders of worth are likely to be the most often mobilized by organizations engaged in economic activities, any other world is also likely to intervene in corporate affairs, as demonstrated by the choice of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006: 150–152) to empirically illustrate their conceptualization of all orders of worth by the study of books intended to guide cadres in daily business situations. Two additional orders of worth have since been theorized by proponents of the framework. The green world features environmental concerns and give worth to sustainability (Thévenot et al., 2000). The project world values flexibility and adaptation within the network-oriented forms typical of recent trends in capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Annex 1 provides an overview of these eight worlds, together with their main features (Gond and Leca, 2012).

In the coming paragraphs, we further substantiate how the sociology of conventions can foster a better understanding of how organizational members deal with pluralism in contrast to neo-institutional approaches to this question.

First, with respect to pluralism, what significantly distinguishes the sociology of conventions from the institutional logics perspective is that pluralism is conceived of no longer as a transitional issue to be eventually solved but now as inherent to any social setting (Cloutier and Langley, 2013; Daudigeos and Valiorgue, 2010). Indeed, all orders of worth are always accessible to individuals, who deal with the ambiguity this situation entails by deciding upon the order of worth that should apply in a given context. In the same way, worth is not attributed to people and objects once and for all, their status being attached only to situations. Pluralism thus no longer appears as a predicament in search of a resolution but rather as an organic constituent of social life. In particular, organizations are rightly described ‘not as unified entities characterized in terms of spheres of activity, systems of actors, or fields, but as composite assemblages that include arrangements deriving from different worlds’ (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 18).

A second major distinction from new-institutionalist approaches relates to the way the sociology of conventions conceives of agency (Brandl et al., 2014). Although new institutionalism has developed concepts such as institutional work and institutional entrepreneurship to offer room for agency and thus counterbalance its initial emphasis on structures (Daudigeos, 2013; Lawrence et al., 2011; Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010), individuals’ agentic capacities still remain limited because they are themselves determined by the structural position that agents occupy in the field or organization (Battilana, 2006). As a consequence, institutional entrepreneurs often appear as outliers – institutional heroes who have miraculously escaped the usual status of ‘cultural dope’ afforded to ordinary individuals (for an example, see Thornton et al., 2012: Chapter 5). In the sociology of conventions, individuals conversely gain the status of fully-fledged actors, now equipped with reflexive capacities (Pernkopf-Konhausner, 2014). Their justifications entail not only choosing the order of worth they deem appropriate for the situation but also expressing critiques and compromises, these two concepts being central to the sociology of conventions. The first – criticism – can be understood along two lines, reformist and radical (Boltanski, 2011). The former applies when critiques, in a particular situation, acknowledge the legitimacy of the world that currently prevails but denounce the presence of elements pertaining to other worlds deemed illegitimate. This type of criticism thus aims at restoring the purity of the situation by reinforcing the actual prevalence of the world that is deemed legitimate. The latter applies to critiques that are formulated about the world that currently prevails, from another world. This

type of criticism thus aims to contest the legitimacy of the prevalent world in order to impose a different world as more legitimate. The second of these concepts is the one of compromise (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 277–278). To pursue their course of action, actors sometimes need to put aside their disagreement about the world that is relevant to the situation. This may lead to a compromise, which more or less explicitly acknowledges the legitimate influence of two worlds.

To summarize, in addition to its characterization of pluralism through distinct orders of worth, the sociology of conventions offers several opportunities in the study of organizational phenomena. In particular, we emphasize the fact that it views pluralism as inherent to social life and provides concepts of criticism and compromise to substantiate this view. We here contend that such premises offer a strong avenue for furthering our understanding of the types of responses individuals may develop when confronted with pluralism. For instance, Moursli and Cobbaut (2006) show that a given activity – the nursing-home industry in their case – can lead to distinct compromises between orders of worth depending on the status of the organization: state-owned, non-profit or private. In our case, we question how individuals that share a set of principles may express distinct responses to these. With some of the concepts we have introduced, the research question can now be reformulated as follows: what are the different types of critiques and compromises that support possible individual responses to a shared set of evaluative principles?

## **Data and methods**

This section presents the data and methods used to answer our research question. The first sub-section introduces the empirical setting. The second and third sub-sections respectively describe the data collection and analysis.

### ***Empirical setting***

The chosen empirical setting is that of French worker co-operatives. We first introduce the international co-operative movement and provide a brief analysis of its guiding values and principles, in terms of Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) orders of worth. Then, we more specifically situate French worker co-operatives within this movement by describing their main features.

***Co-operatives as an example of a hybrid organization.*** According to the sociology of conventions, pluralism is definitely a concern for all kinds of organizations since all orders of worth are always available to actors (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 32–33). However, hybrid organizations still constitute a privileged object of study when seeking to understand how organizations deal with it (Battilana and Lee, 2014). Hybrid organizations are indeed organizations whose identity precisely draws on the combination of distinct orders of worth, and thus overtly strive to compromise between multiple principles, as is the case for commercial microfinance organizations (Battilana and Dorado, 2010) and social integration enterprises (Pache and Santos, 2013b). As such, organizations of this type do not passively react to pluralism, as may be the case for most organizations, but instead proactively engage with it. This feature makes them particularly amenable to the study of individual responses to pluralism because their members are more often than others confronted with situations where the pursuit of their course of action implies justification (Jagd, 2011).

Co-operatives, which seek by definition to link an economic principle with a social one, are such an example of a hybrid organization (Leca et al., 2014; Webb and Cheney, 2014). But, interestingly, co-operatives provide an additional level at which pluralism can be analysed, the international co-operative movement having elaborated on a set of values and principles which may orient co-operators' grasp of co-operative spirit (Birchall, 1997, 2005; ICA, 1995). Co-operatives thus offer a privileged position from which to understand how individuals may articulate different responses to a shared set of diverse principles. Annex 2 shows the statement of 'Co-operative identity, values and principles' issued by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA, 1995). The seven principles it contains are also referred to as the 'Rochdale principles', tracing their inspiration back to the birth of the co-operative movement, namely the establishment in 1844 in the north of England of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers (Fairbairn, 1994). The International Co-operative Alliance adopted its first version of the document in 1937 (ICA, 1937). Two later revisions occurred, one in 1966 and the other in 1995, the latter version still being in force today (ICA, 1966, 1995).

***Co-operatives' principles in light of the sociology of conventions.*** We now analyse the content of this statement of principles in light of Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) orders of worth. At a general level, co-operatives can be understood as representing a compromise between the market and civic orders. This compromise is made visible in the definition:



A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise. (ICA, 1995)

The satisfaction of economic needs and aspirations clearly points to the market world, but is immediately counterbalanced by the reference to needs and aspirations that are not economic but also social and cultural. The references to collective ('united voluntarily' and 'jointly-owned') and democratic ('democratically-controlled enterprise') ways of organizing are then typical of the civic world. The following statement, about co-operative values, confirms the orientation towards the civic world, the common good here appearing, as designated in its collective dimension. Interestingly, the nature of the compromise with the market world it entails is not even mentioned:

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, *democracy*, *equality*, *equity* and *solidarity*. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, *social responsibility* and *caring for others*. (ICA, 1995: our emphasis on elements of the civic world)

The seven Rochdale principles (as listed in Annex 2), then, state how these notions from the civic world apply more concretely to the co-operative. In particular, principles 1 and 2 develop the notions of 'voluntary and open membership' and 'democratic member control', which are cornerstones of the civic world. However, the other five principles are more ambivalent in that they either introduce other non-market worlds or articulate more complex critiques and compromises. Principle 3 – member economic participation – can thus be read as a critique of the market world in the sense that it overtly describes the features of the co-operative by contrasting them with those of traditional, for-profit organizations: '*At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed...*' (our emphasis). This critique is sometimes expressed from the civic world ('Members contribute *equitably* to, and *democratically* control...', our emphasis) and sometimes from the industrial world, surpluses being for instance allocated to 'developing [the] co-operative'. In the same vein, principle 4 – autonomy and independence – can also read as a critique by the civic world of the market world, 'democratic control' and 'co-operative autonomy' needing to be preserved against dominant market rules ('raise capital from external sources'). Principle 5 – education, training

and information – relies on several orders of worth. Its first sentence is grounded in the industrial world, ‘education and training’ being provided in order to sustain the ‘development of [the] co-operatives’. Its second sentence acknowledges a compromise between the civic world (targeting ‘the general public’) and the world of fame, with its focus on information, especially when it refers to ‘opinion leaders’. Principle 6 – co-operation among co-operatives – is grounded in the industrial world, the notion of efficiency being expressed (‘effectively’ and ‘strengthen’), but can also read as one more critique of the market world. By promoting interdependence, co-operation among co-operatives indeed proposes introducing an alternative to the flexible and one-time arrangements that prevail in the market world. This co-operation must be envisaged at the ‘local’ level (in reference to the domestic world) as well as at wider levels. Finally, principle 7 – concern for community – articulates a compromise between the green and domestic worlds, ‘sustainable development’ (green world) being an objective for ‘communities’ (domestic world).

Having described the set of diverse values and principles shared by co-operatives in light of the approach to pluralism taken by the sociology of conventions, we now turn more specifically to the case of French co-operators.

***French worker co-operatives.*** In France, the creation of worker co-operatives dates back to the nineteenth century, with their development being linked to the ideas of prominent political philosophers such as Saint-Simon, Fourier and Proudhon (Archambault, 1997; Espagne, 2000). Worker co-operatives are usually gathered under the SCOP label, originally standing for *Société Coopérative Ouvrière de Production* (literally ‘Co-operative Workers’ Society of Production’) and since 2010 for *Société Coopérative et Participative* (‘Co-operative and Participative Society’), a legal status governed by a mix of ordinary laws on commercial enterprises and co-operative laws directly inspired by the ICA principles (Moulin, 2014). More than 2,600 SCOP currently operate in France, employing more than 50,000 workers, of which some 26,000 are associates (CG-SCOP, 2015). The SCOP are represented at national level by the *Confédération Générale des SCOP* (CG-SCOP) – ‘General Confederation of SCOP’ – and locally supported by *Unions Régionales des SCOP* (URSCOP) – ‘Regional Unions of SCOP’. The CG-SCOP promotes the worker co-operative model and seeks to give it some political weight, while an URSCOP is in charge of providing direct support (legal, financial, technical and co-operative-culture-related) in creating or sustaining the co-operatives within its geographic area. While most worker co-operatives are directly

incorporated as SCOP, the co-operative is also increasingly recognized as a possible means of succession planning when the founders of a company retire. One fifth of SCOP now being constituted are former companies that become worker co-operatives following the departure of their owners (CG-SCOP, 2012).

Interestingly, worker co-operatives are peculiar in that they do not comply with the first co-operative principle, namely that membership is open to everyone on a voluntary basis. Indeed, unlike consumer co-operatives, which anyone can join if they wish, worker co-operatives usually (with the exception of some business and employment co-operatives, which will sometimes integrate any entrepreneur willing to launch a new activity) rely on a hiring process that is similar to that in place in traditional enterprises. Employees are initially recruited on the basis of competence, according to the needs of the co-operative, and are usually then offered the opportunity to become an associate within two years. For this reason, the set of common principles that applies to worker co-operatives is probably best described using the reformulation proposed by Birchall for the 2005 ICA general assembly (Birchall, 2005). In this document, aimed at integrating the experience of the ten years since the 1995 update of the co-operative statement, the first principle of voluntary membership is displaced by a principle of member benefit. It is this revised set of principles (in which we will from now on report member benefit as principle 8) that we will consider when looking at the role of critiques and compromises within French co-operators' responses to pluralism. We now turn to the processes of data collection and analysis.

### ***Data collection***

Our data were collected during a working seminar held in November 2011 in Grenoble (France). Responding to an invitation to the launch of an academic project dedicated to the study of French worker co-operatives, around 15 actors from the co-operative movement gathered for half a day in order to discuss their vision of these organizations. First, participants were asked to introduce their activity and position within the co-operative movement, and to briefly respond to the following questions: (1) What led you to the co-operative sector? (2) Why did you decide to create or work for a co-operative? (3) What are the advantages of a co-operative? (4) What are the drawbacks of a co-operative? The main part of the seminar then consisted in direct interactions between the participants, who engaged

in discussions that led them to detail their own viewpoints and to critique those expressed by others.

Participants to the seminar included: nine members of worker co-operatives representing seven separate organizations; three representatives of their support environment (a co-operative bank, a local public authority in charge of social economy, and an URSCOP); two consultants offering their services to co-operatives; eight researchers interested in the topic, including the three authors of this article. This represented a total of 21 people, one person having a double status of co-operator and researcher. Annex 3 details the participants. The choice of the participating co-operators was aimed at maximizing diversity, in terms of activities (high-tech, food, editing, accountancy, business and employment co-operatives), seniority (nearly 40 years for the most experienced, and just now transitioning to SCOP status for the newest to the field) and size (from a few people to several hundred). Only geographic diversity was limited, with five of the seven co-operatives represented being from the Grenoble area and the other two from Paris. Annex 4 provides more information on the participants. During the discussion, co-operators mainly reported on their own experience within their current co-operative, with only a few references to their former experiences for those who had already occupied other positions in the co-operative movement. Representatives of support organizations and consultants referred in their case to a larger variety of examples, being generally exposed in their activities to a broad range of worker co-operatives. In all cases (and in line with the initial questions they were asked about their personal motivations for joining the co-operative sector), participants expressed their own views about co-operation (in contrast to speaking, for instance, on behalf of their home organization); this justifies why we considered our empirical material as dealing with individual rather than organizational responses to pluralism. Researchers limited their interventions to occasionally requesting further explanations of some statements, prompting or rebalancing the debate. Apart from the introductory presentation of the objectives of the academic group, the whole seminar was videotaped and transcribed.

Focussing on a single event, in particular a meeting or workshop, is a well-established approach within organization studies, since it allows producing fine-grained analyses based on the precise use of empirical material (Kärreman and Alvesson, 2001; Rasmussen, 2011; Thomas et al., 2011). In contrast with interview-based methods, which generally involve more informants but do not allow confronting them, the focus on a meeting or workshop allows the

data collection process to benefit from the interactions of the participants. It is also highly consistent with the sociology of conventions' epistemological stance and its focus on situations. The working seminar analysed here, in which co-operators are led to justify the principles they adopt in the context of their co-operative activities, can indeed be considered a typical situation of justification. While we attended several events of the same kind, that is meetings and workshops where co-operators were similarly invited to speak about their appropriation of co-operative principles, we chose to focus on the afore-described event because it displayed the most vivid debate and broadest range of co-operators' positions. Several reasons may explain this: 1) the presence of a large number of participants (around 15) as contrasted with the usual reliance on only a few (three to four); 2) the invitation of co-operators based on criteria of representativeness rather than exemplariness, thus avoiding the usual selection bias towards the most committed co-operators, *i.e.* those whom we will later characterise as political co-operators; 3) the restriction of the attendance to the sole members of the co-operative movement and research team, which is likely to have given way to bolder arguments than those usually expressed in front of a broader external audience.

### ***Data analysis***

In order to make sense of the collected data, we applied coding techniques with the help of the atlas.ti software (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). We performed two successive stages of coding. In the first, we used a distinct code for each of the seven Rochdale principles, complemented by an eighth code corresponding to Birchall's additional suggested principle of member benefit (Birchall, 2005). Segments of the text that covered multiple principles were given as many codes as needed, while other segments were not coded because they did not refer to any co-operative principle. In the second coding stage, each of the eight orders of worth identified by the sociology of conventions was used as a code ('i' for inspired, 'd' for domestic, 'o' for fame, 'c' for civic, 'm' for market, 'u' for industrial, 'v' for green and 'p' for project). During this second coding stage, we followed Patriotta and colleagues' (2011) advice, which consists of referring to the list of words provided by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) and their followers (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Thévenot et al., 2000) so as to ease the process of identification of the worlds at stake. Their description of each order of worth indeed evidences a collection of words or expressions that are typical thereof and whose presence in a statement usually constitutes a reliable indicator of the underlying world (Patriotta et al., 2011).

Additionally, critiques and compromises were also coded, based on the same convention as that used by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006). For instance, a statement showing an agreement to compromise between the market and the civic worlds was noted 'm-c'. Similarly, a statement corresponding to a critique directed at the market world and expressed from the civic world was noted 'm/c'. Twelve compromise codes were created, which involved all eight existing orders of worth, although the civic-market compromise was found to be the most frequent. Six critique codes were actually needed, mostly relating to the civic, market and industrial worlds, and more rarely the domestic world. In the case of critiques directed at the market and expressed from the civic world, we also later introduced a distinction between soft ('m/c') and strong ('m//c', with a double slash) critiques so as to take into account that the latter contained an aim of displacement of the market order while the former did not.

Then, in order to identify the different ways for co-operators to respond to their common set of principles, we oriented our attention to the segments of our data that, while relating to the same co-operative principle (first coding stage), displayed notably different references to, critiques towards or compromises between orders of worth (second coding stage). For instance, in line with the preliminary analysis of the ICA's statement on co-operative identity, values and principles, we expected that segments related to the second principle (democratic member control) would also be related to the civic world. The segments thus deemed to be of particular interest were those that, while referring to the second principle, at the same time displayed an unexpected pattern regarding the coding of their related orders of worth – for instance, in this case, we also found critiques by the industrial world of the civic world, and compromises between the two. By doing this, we were able to identify five principles towards which co-operators significantly differed in their positions, that is respectively principles 2 (democratic member control), 3 (member economic participation), 6 (co-operation among co-operatives), 7 (concern for community) and 8 (member benefit). In our analysis, we decided to group principles 7 and 8 since those two principles, which are indeed in tension, were quasi-systematically referred together by co-operators. For each of these four principles or group of principles, we actually identified three distinct positions held by co-operators, namely two extreme ones and an intermediary one. On the contrary, principles 1 (voluntary and open membership), 4 (autonomy and independence) and 5 (education, training and information) did not allow us to identify clear oppositions between co-operators, either because they were little or not discussed (respectively principle 4 and principle 1, which does

not apply to worker co-operatives as we earlier explained) during the workshop or because they only generated consensual talks (principle 5).

As a next step, we checked whether there were links between the positions expressed by co-operators towards a given principle and those expressed towards another. And indeed, we observed that co-operators who occupy a certain position along one principle have more chance of occupying given positions along the others. Most of the time, the links that connect various principles actually appear explicitly in the justificatory explanations of the co-operators. Based on these relationships, we could therefore propose a threefold typology of French co-operators, which distinguishes *pragmatic*, *reformist* and *political* co-operators. The three proposed types should be understood as ideal-types, the possibility remaining that some co-operators for instance display features from two types.

As a last step, and in order to ensure the robustness of the results, we discussed our findings with a recognized expert. Working as a consultant within an URSCOP, this person was in charge of assisting around 40 worker co-operatives. The aim was to validate the distinctions made in the positions held by co-operators towards co-operative principles and confirm that the threefold typology produced adequately reflected the diversity of the co-operators he was currently supporting or had previously supported. These discussions led to the validation of the identified positions and proposed typology, while at the same time refining our understanding of some of the co-operative principles and the links between them. The following section presents the results obtained through this process, which are also recapitulated in Table 2. In this table, the columns correspond to the three types of co-operators identified and the rows to the four principles or group of principles towards which they display distinct positions. Within each cell, a label summarizes the position identified and the mobilized orders of worth, critiques and compromises are then indicated. A verbatim deemed particularly illustrative is also provided.

\*\*\*\* Insert Table 2 about here \*\*\*\*

## Findings

In the first four sub-sections here, we successively present the principles or group of principles towards which we have identified significant variations in co-operators' positions. For each principle, we detail in particular the various usages of critiques and compromises

made by co-operators (see Table 2 for an overview). In the fifth sub-section, by drawing on the links that co-operators establish between their relative positions along these four principles or group of principles, we detail our proposed threefold typology of French co-operators.

***Principle 2 – Member Democratic Control: articulating the civic and industrial worlds***

The first principle in which variations appear in co-operators' responses is that of member democratic control, the second ICA principle. This principle is indeed differently interpreted by co-operators, with some taking a purely formal approach to democracy and others having a strong will to promote self-management as their ultimate goal. An intermediate position is also found, where a balance is sought between democracy and chain of command. The responses at work involve the civic world, earlier presented as foundational of the democratic principle, and the industrial world.

On the formal side, democracy sometimes appears merely as a matter of compliance with SCOP status, which translates into law the principle of 'one member, one vote'. The influence of the civic order must stay under the control of the industrial order, democratic functioning being perceived as jeopardizing organizational efficiency. Co-operative 7, which is transitioning to the status of SCOP, provides such an illustration:

If we want it to work properly (...), we will not spend our time in discussion. There will be a chain of command to be respected and we will see each other once or twice a year at the annual general meeting, where we will discuss a certain number of things.  
(Co-operative 7, accountancy firm)

While this position can be read as a critique of the civic world by the industrial world, the intermediate position more clearly features a compromise between the two. In this case, democracy is encouraged and various mechanisms aim at developing the responsibilities of the co-operators. The following dialogue between Co-operative 2 (information technology) and Co-operative 7 (accountancy) illustrates the gap between the two positions:

Co-operative 7: The point is to avoid there being 60 employees who all become CEOs.  
Co-operative 2: It is rather the opposite that takes place. I mean, you need instead to cultivate democracy. (...) Otherwise, if you let it go, you end up with an organization



the same as any other. The task is rather like saying: ‘Come on, we provide you with information, so we also expect you to express yourself’.

The third position towards democracy advocates the civic world without compromising with the industrial world, or at least doing so only marginally. The spirit put forward is one of self-management, where co-operators act autonomously and where hierarchical links, though still existing, are redefined in a way that distinguishes them from subordinating ones. This approach relies on a philosophical vision of humans that it is co-operative organizations’ mission to embody:

How can we make sure that the annual general meeting is not a purely formal exercise, where everybody can indeed vote, but nobody knows what it’s about and nobody is involved enough in the management? This raises the question of self-management, or at least of an expansive involvement in management. (...) And behind that, there is actually a vision of humans. That is to say, people at work can be autonomous. (URSCOP representative)

Personally, I am very much into self-management. This does not mean that there is no longer any hierarchical link, but provided that we define what hierarchy means... (Co-operative 4, business and employment)

### ***Principle 3 – Member Economic Participation: articulating the market and civic worlds***

The second principle that generates significant variations in co-operators’ responses is that of member economic participation (principle 3). As noted earlier, this principle reads as a critique of the market world, expressed from either the civic or the industrial world. Our data in fact reveal a more diverse interpretation of this principle by co-operators, three distinct positions possibly being identified. Although this principle seems at first sight to encompass rather technical aspects of co-operation (capital subscription by members, indivisible reserves, etc.), it immediately leads, when raised in the discussion, co-operators to position themselves more broadly towards capitalism. At one extreme, co-operators have an open attitude towards capitalism and build a friendly compromise between civic and market worlds. At the other, they express strong criticism towards capitalism from the civic world. The intermediate position consists of expressing softer criticism from a variety of worlds.

At one end of the spectrum, some co-operators consider there is no need to contrast the co-operative movement with capitalism. In their justifications, they argue that the co-operative does not occupy an extra-territorial position *vis-à-vis* the dominant capitalist economic system:

This is not a fight against capitalism; it is a different way of working. (...) [The co-operative movement] operates within a system, which is what it is, that's fine ... And it offers some individuals the chance to work for themselves and for their own benefit. (...) I don't see any difficulty in having both systems operating at the same time. (Co-operative 7, accountancy firm)

This compatibility between capitalism and co-operatives is sometimes highlighted even to the point where co-operatives appear as an advanced form of capitalism, all workers themselves becoming capitalists, as shown by the same co-operator's recall of the explanations provided to future co-operators in transition from a traditional enterprise to a SCOP:

... you become capitalists with a share of the capital. (Co-operative 7, accountancy firm)

At the other end of the spectrum, attention is oppositely paid to distinguishing co-operatives from traditional for-profit enterprises. The emphasis is put on the indivisibility of reserves, which does not allow capital remuneration and growth, this being viewed as undermining capitalist core postulates:

The SCOP status claims something in terms of capital. When we say that the reserves are indivisible, it means something. And I think that is hugely embarrassing [for actors of the classical economy]. (Co-operative 2, information technology)

... it is even not about ideology and all that, but, from a legal perspective, [the co-operative form] is a form which is not capitalist. (...) It is not capitalist because the legal status does not allow the appreciation of capital. (URSCOP representative)

Drawing on this essential clarification, co-operators then develop a critical stance towards capitalism, which usually takes the form of critiques targeting the market world from the civic one. Reacting to the idea that co-operation and capitalism may be compatible, one co-operator for instance states:

I disagree with what was just said, talking about capitalism. I am anti-capitalist and I state it very clearly. (...) Otherwise, we run the risk of going round in circles with our language, explaining how we are ‘sticking a plaster’ on capitalism. (Co-operative 4, business and employment co-operative)

An intermediate position comprises co-operators who express softer critiques towards capitalism, namely the market world. In this case, it is no longer about opposing a different system to the capitalist one, but rather about correcting the most visible excesses of the market. Their critiques are sometimes expressed from within the market world itself, an excessive market concentration for instance being denounced as a hindrance to fair competition. Other critiques originate at the same time from the industrial world, the financialization of the economy preventing the development of long-term projects and strategies, as well as from a mix of civic and domestic worlds, the excesses of financial capitalism putting at threat local activities and employment:

Today (...) we face actors’ consolidation in the market. The lead actor is a British investment fund named [name of the fund], which has already bought two of our competitors. (...) And I think it really raises the question about what we want to do with enterprises. It has bought [name of enterprise]: they had 120 employees, but now have 60. (...) Certainly, it will harm our market. (...) These are now enterprises (...) that are managed by financial actors who take no account of the employees who work there, what we want to do with the software, and the fact that we operate here in Grenoble... (Co-operative 2, information technology)

#### ***Principle 6 – Co-operation among Co-operatives: articulating the market and civic worlds***

The third principle that generates significant variations in co-operators’ responses is that of co-operation between co-operatives (principle 6). Again, this principle is indeed differently interpreted by co-operators, with some understanding the possibility for co-operatives to contract with other co-operatives simply as a market opportunity and others promoting a world where generalized co-operation would eventually overcome competition. An intermediate position is also found, where co-operation between co-operatives is perceived as a protective means to alleviate the harshness of competition. The positions at work involve the same worlds, critiques and compromises as those found in relation with principle 3.

At one end of the spectrum, co-operation between co-operatives is before all envisaged as a market opportunity. Although principle 6 precisely infringes principles of free and undistorted market competition by privileging contracting with other co-operatives over contracting with non-co-operative organizations, it is nonetheless reinterpreted in market terms in that it offers a competitive advantage likely to increase one's market share:

We realized that there are 2,000 SCOP in France and that there is a huge need [for accounting services] because their registered accountants lack knowledge about SCOP. For us, as a firm of 60 people, it is a rather amazing market opportunity. (Co-operative 7, accountancy firm)

In opposition to this opportunist understanding, co-operators who side at the other end of the spectrum interpret principle 6 as a call for the implementation of a broad political programme aimed at reembedding the economy into social relations:

[It is about] being able to live logics that are not win-lose but win-win, in a system of co-operation, and not in one of competition and rivalry. (Co-operative bank representative)

This assumes the building of institutions that will progressively offer co-operatives an environment able to challenge and eventually overcome the dominantly capitalistic organization of society:

I have in mind the CEO of a mutual insurance company saying: 'Let's not dream – all enterprises cannot become part of the social economy; we cannot imagine that a company manufacturing aircraft would become a co-operative, given its need to finance projects over 10 or 20 years.' But, actually, the only legitimate argument supporting such a statement (...) is that we don't have adequate institutions for financing this in a co-operative form. Nothing actually forbids this from being possible. We don't manufacture aircrafts only to enrich shareholders. (URSCOP representative)

In between these two interpretations, an intermediary position can be identified, where co-operation between co-operatives rather resembles a defensive strategy in that it is recognized for its ability to protect co-operatives against the excesses of competition. Mutualization of

resources is one of those means by which co-operatives may seek to benefit from this shielding effect of co-operation between co-operatives:

The idea that progressively came to my mind was that of co-operative systems where we pool resources so as to allow a better critical size to be reached by founded companies, which in any case, in biotechnologies, address the same customers. (Co-operative 5, biotechnologies)

***Principle 7 – Concern for Community & Principle 8 – Member Benefit: distinct articulations of the civic world***

Finally, the fourth group of principles towards which co-operators respond differently relates to the way they combine the principles of concern for community (principle 7) and member benefit (principle 8). These two principles actually introduce some tension in the co-operative spirit and call for trade-offs to be made (Birchall, 2005). Again, we identify three dominant positions towards this group of principles.

On one hand, priority is given to member benefit, which is mainly understood in a rather narrow, financial way. Co-operative 7, which is transitioning to the status of SCOP in the context of a succession plan, provides such an illustration, as shown by the statement of its retiring founder:

I want to transfer the accountancy function to my employees because they are the ones who have brought the added value. (Co-operative 7, accountancy firm)

Interestingly, this new benefit is expected to come at a price – what Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) call an ‘investment form’, *i.e.* the idea of paying for the privilege of reaching worthiness in a given world by giving up certain advantages.

As you say, they’ll probably have to understand that they’ll have to work longer hours. (Consulting firm 1)

At this end of the spectrum, little or no reference is made to community benefit. This first type of response contrasts with the intermediate position, which articulates a compromise between the member- and community-benefit principles so as to set them on an equal footing. For instance, it is argued that the co-operative organization contributes, through its stability and

sustainability, to maintaining employment, thus benefiting both members and community (here used in its local, domestic sense):

It is true that it is difficult to operate under [co-operative status] but at the same time it has been a guarantee of sustainability. If the founders had not created this limited-liability company with this co-operative capital, we would have disappeared a long time ago. (Co-operative 1, editing)

In this example, a critique is also implicitly directed at the market world since it is suggested that the adoption of a capitalist form would have rapidly driven the organization out of business. Another feature that distinguishes this intermediary position from that described earlier lies in the fact that co-operators display greater understanding of member benefit, which may include risk mutualization, increase in responsibilities and having a say in the future of the enterprise:

When hiring, (...) the fact that we are a co-operative organization makes it rather 'sexy'. They are very interested because they feel they won't just be the engineer or the researcher who will be used to value the company, but rather a stakeholder in the company's development. (Co-operative 5, biotechnologies)

Finally, the third kind of response favours community over member benefit. The former is then understood in a broad civic sense rather than a domestic one. Some co-operators, for instance, insist on the fact that they voluntarily pay more taxes by resorting to fiscal under-optimization schemes that entail higher contributions to the national security or pension systems. This aspect is visible in Co-operative 4, a business and employment organization, with the co-operators largely choosing to stay within the co-operative once their activity has become profitable, at the expense of their own income. From this perspective, what remains of the member-benefit principle is the involvement of the co-operators in the global project of working towards a more cohesive society in which they strongly believe:

With income, we create social links, solidarity, social protection. This is costly but we take it on. (...) Why don't co-operators leave the co-operative once their activities have built momentum? (...) They would strongly benefit from doing so. They could do much better for themselves elsewhere, yet they prefer to continue to pay 55% for social security. They must be mad. But it happens, which means there must really be something going for it. (Co-operative 4, business and employment)

Here again, this position is often accompanied by critiques directed at the market world, as exemplified by the following statement in which financial speculation is denounced as a hindrance to the deployment of the civic world:

Wheat is a food staple before being an object of financial speculation. It is the same for a molecule: it is for healing, for helping. (Co-operative 5, biotechnologies)

To summarize, we identified four principles or group of principles towards which French co-operators expressed distinct views. The sociology of conventions proved to be of great help in characterizing these distinct positions, because it allowed us to ground differences in different orders of worth as well as different types of critiques and compromises. Building on this first step, we next provide a typology of French co-operators that links together co-operators' positions towards these four principles or group of principles.

### ***A threefold typology: pragmatic, reformist and political co-operators***

Co-operators who occupy a certain position towards a given principle have more chance of occupying a certain position towards another principle and, very often, the links that co-operators establish between two principles actually appear explicitly in their justifications. The proposed typology thus reflects the fact that the positions adopted by co-operators towards principles or group of principles tend to draw patterns. The three proposed types should nonetheless be understood as ideal-types, the possibility remaining that some co-operators display features from two types in relation to different principles. For each type, we also identified a core co-operative principle (two for our last type) around which other principles tend to be organized.

The type of co-operators that we have coined as *pragmatic* pursue market objectives with the aim of contributing to member benefit, which is the principle put at the forefront of the co-operative project. The notion of member benefit is itself understood in a rather narrow way, expressed mostly in financial terms. In this model, other principles such as those of member democratic control and concern for community occupy a backstage position and remain subordinate to the member-benefit principle. For instance, the level of involvement of the co-operators in the governance of the organization can remain at quite a low level, similar to that found in traditional companies. Regarding their position towards capitalism (as rendered visible through their positions towards principles 3 and 6), the pragmatic co-operators adopt

an open stance that considers co-operative organizations as fundamentally compatible with core capitalist assumptions.

While the pragmatic co-operator insists on member benefit, the *reformist* co-operator puts at the forefront the concern for community or even for society at large. In the French context, the reformist co-operative may be said to have found its legal recognition through the creation in 2001 of the status of SCIC (*Société Coopérative d'Intérêt Collectif* – ‘Co-operative Society for the Common Good’), a sub-category of SCOP status, in which the social utility of the organization is officially recognized. If the principle of member benefit seems to occupy a background position in the mind of the reformist co-operator, it is because this takes on a new form, the democratic organization often functioning as the main motivation for co-operators, apart from commitment to collective interests. We then observe more extensive participation of co-operators in the management of their organizations, though without going as far as self-management. Reformist co-operators propose mitigating some of the negative effects of capitalism by correcting its most salient excesses. They can thus be described as willing to rebalance – rather than displace – capitalism.

Finally, the co-operator that we have coined as *political* tends to propose a universalistic model of society. In its archetypal form, the political co-operator wants to promote the most advanced forms of democracy, including self-management, and a global alternative to capitalism. The principles of member democratic control and co-operation between co-operatives are thus central here, understood as the will to promote a mode of economic regulation based on co-operation rather than competition, and to embody a particular vision of people and society. In this frame, questions such as member benefit and concern for community, rather than being subordinate to the core principles, appear as their logical consequences. In this configuration, the question of the trade-off between member and community benefits seems to be overcome (Birchall, 2005). Unsurprisingly, it is therefore in the context of the political co-operative that the links uniting the various co-operative principles are made the most visible. Indeed, the statements of the co-operators reveal organic links between the various principles that we previously analyzed as separate, for heuristic reasons. For instance, real democracy can develop only in organizations that are shielded from capitalist rules:



How do we succeed in constructing an organizational model based on a vision of people that is different? (...) It is in this respect that the question of the [member] ownership guaranteed by [co-operative] status is, in my view, absolutely fundamental. This is, for me, the limit to any corporate social responsibility or participative management approach within big corporations. As long as these questions of ownership remain, there will always be a fundamentally unfair balance of power. (Institutional representative, URSCOP)

In the next section, we discuss the implications of our study and draw conclusions.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Our starting point was the realization that the emerging stream of research interested in individual responses to pluralism builds on at least three distinct understandings of what being confronted to plural logics means to organizational members (see Table 1 as a reminder). In an exploratory fashion aimed at challenging current approaches and better circumscribing issues at stake in the debate, we thus proposed the introduction of the sociology of conventions as an additional perspective from which to study this question. The application of this theoretical framework indeed led us to evidence several shortcomings of current perspectives and our contribution to the understanding of individual responses to pluralism is threefold. First, the concept of critique allows a finer-grained characterization of individual responses to pluralism by distinguishing positive affirmations from critical mobilizations of a given logic. Second, our study shows that pluralism can be understood not only as having multiple logics, but also along different possible instantiations of the same logic, the ambiguity of which allows compromises to be settled with other logics. Third, drawing on the concept of instantiation, we suggest that organizational members' responses to pluralism often involve more than two logics, which are combined into a complex set of interdependent positions. In addition, in relation to co-operatives studies, our proposed typology provides a mapping that usefully delineates the range of possibilities found in co-operators' interpretations of co-operative principles, thus furthering our understanding of the diversity of the co-operative movement together with that of the links between co-operative principles.

### ***Characterizing individual responses to pluralism through critiques***

Our study demonstrates the relevance of the sociology of conventions for furthering our understanding of the types of responses that organizational members formulate in the face of pluralism because it, first of all, shows that the concept of critique is often very important in fully characterizing individual responses. For the actors involved, justifying their course of action by simply referring to the order of worth that should prevail is not the same as both referring to it and using it as a basis for criticizing another order of worth. Our data in fact show that a good deal of the justifications advanced by co-operators not only qualify the relevant world but also express through it – sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly – a critique of other worlds. In the case we studied, we observe, for instance, many statements that express not only justifications grounded in the civic order but also a critique of the market order, in line with a feature we had already identified in some of the ICA principles. In their study of the functioning of a drug court, McPherson and Sauder (2013) observe that actors do not narrowly adhere to the logic that is prevalent within their profession, *e.g.* the logic of criminal punishment for a probation officer or that of rehabilitation for a clinician, but are instead capable of strategically referring to other logics (see also Voronov et al., 2013 for a similar observation). But although the authors provide quantified elements on how often this happens, they fail to indicate the extent to which those references to remote logics build on positive affirmations or, rather, entail a form of critique. For instance, when the authors state that ‘the logic of rehabilitation was adopted on 35 occasions to argue for less severe sanctions, but – and more surprisingly – [that] it was also invoked on 14 occasions to argue for more punitive sanctions’ (McPherson and Sauder, 2013: 179), it is hard to believe that those 14 invocations were not, at least in some cases, expressing a critique of the logic of rehabilitation. This illustration thus shows that the sociology of conventions, sometimes also referred to as the ‘sociology of critique’ (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999; Delanty, 2011), by recognizing actors’ critical capacities and conceptualizing the role of criticism, brings an important tool for refining the analysis of pluralism and its instantiations.

However, our study also shows that the distinction made by Boltanski (2011) between reformist and radical critiques is not always the most relevant to characterize these. Boltanski indeed distinguishes reformist critiques, which are expressed towards a given world from inside the very same world and aim to purify it, from radical critiques, which are expressed towards a given world from another world, and aim to displace the former with the latter. Our study instead evidences a distinction between soft and strong critiques, which are both

expressed towards a given world from outside but carry different meanings. On one hand, the political co-operator addresses critiques to the market world from the civic world, with the aim of displacement (strong critique). On the other, the reformist co-operator also addresses critiques to the market world from other worlds (namely the domestic, industrial or civic worlds) but without the aim of displacement (soft critique). In this case, criticism is neither about purifying the market world nor about displacing it, but rather about calling for compromises with other worlds.

### ***Pluralism within a single logic and the ‘how’ of logic adherence***

Our second contribution lies in extending the way pluralism is conceived of. Indeed, pluralism is generally defined by the simultaneous presence of multiple logics (Cloutier and Langley, 2007; Friedland and Alford, 1991; Kraatz and Block, 2008), but our study shows that actually pluralism can also stem from a single logic, whose instantiations may take multiple forms. Already, Beunza and Stark (2004) have suggested, through their ethnographic study of the trading room of an investment bank, that a given logic is not bereft of ambiguity. While an investment bank is indeed oriented towards the single logic of profit, the trading room is nonetheless split into various specialized desks (merger arbitrage, index arbitrage, etc.), which all rely on different evaluative principles, cognitive frames and metrics, thus making the notion of value very ambiguous (Beunza and Stark, 2004; Stark, 2009). Similarly, in the case of co-operatives, we observed that their social objectives, while all grounded in the civic world, also constitute a source of ambiguity. The ICA’s statement of co-operative identity, values and principles is mostly dedicated to the promotion of the civic world but breaks it up into a list of principles that may sometimes call for trade-offs. Co-operators are, therefore, confronted with a civic ambiguity that leads them to articulate distinctive responses. The ambiguity of the civic world is particularly rendered visible in the various positions taken by co-operators towards the principles of concern for community and member benefit. Huault and Rainelli-Weiss (2011) underline that ambiguity is precisely what allows compromises being built between different worlds. And indeed, co-operators take advantage of this ambiguity and modulate the possible meanings associated with the civic world by introducing elements from other worlds, that is compromises: pragmatic co-operators modulate the civic world with elements drawn from the market world to eventually justify the distribution of co-operative benefits exclusively at the level of organizational members; reformist co-operators

introduce a geographic modulation of the civic world with elements drawn from the domestic world so as to situate co-operative benefits at the level of the local community; only political co-operators seem eventually to defend a pure vision of the civic world by keeping their understanding of the common good as universal as possible.

This finding amplifies some of the results put forth by the stance of neo-institutionalism that has adopted a practice-based approach towards individual responses to pluralism (Smets et al., 2015; Smets and Jarzabkowski, 2013). In their view, logics are not ready-to-be-used tools. Rather, they are incomplete frames whose substance and meaning are eventually conferred by the way actors inhabit them (Hallett and Ventresca, 2006). As aptly noticed by Voronov and colleagues (2013: 1564), this feature implies that ‘actors must be selective not only in which logic to adhere to, but also, possibly, in *how* to adhere to a particular logic’ (original emphasis). In evidencing different interpretations of the civic world by co-operators and the role played by compromises and critiques in these, our results contribute to give substance to the ‘how’ of logic adherence. More generally, this reflection on the various possible instantiations of a single logic or principle also suggests that, while empirical sites such as hybrid organizations are still relevant for studying higher orders of pluralism (Battilana and Lee, 2014; Pache and Santos, 2013b), all kinds of settings, including those where pluralism is considered highly unlikely, may constitute appropriate research settings for understanding more subtle facets of pluralism.

### ***Instantiations as comprehensive individual responses to a set of principles***

Our third contribution lies in the evidencing that organizational members, when confronted to a complex environment, build complex responses. For instance, in the case of co-operators, it is not enough to look at the responses which they formulate towards a given principle in isolation from other principles. Rather, it is necessary to consider their overall response to a set of principles. Our observations, such as summarized in our proposed typology of co-operators, indeed indicate that co-operators do not position themselves towards a given co-operative principle independently from the positions they take towards other co-operative principles. For example, political co-operators establish an explicit link between the possibility of self-management as a form of democratic control (principle 2) and the anti-capitalist stance stemming from their understanding of member economic participation (principle 3). In the same way, pragmatic co-operators’ orientation towards members’ benefit

(principles 7 and 8), narrowly understood in material terms, connects with their support for a member democratic control (principle 2) that remains formal and does therefore not impede productivity. It is in this sense that an instantiation should be conceived not simply as the mere actualization of a logic on the ground but more precisely as a complex combination of positions in response to a pluralistic environment.

But it is also important to notice that, within what we call an instantiation, a variety of worlds, critiques and compromises are mobilized so as to compose an original but at the same time consistent response to organizational pluralism. Co-operators do not systematically apply the same formula towards each of the principles they confront. To be sure, pragmatic co-operators rely on compromises between the civic and market worlds to deal with principles 3, 6, 7 and 8, but rely however on critiques directed at the civic world expressed from the industrial world to deal with democratic member control (principle 2). The diversity is even greater in the case of reformist co-operators who mobilize up to four different orders of worth so as to compose their overall response towards co-operative principles. Within this response, only principles 3 and 6 actually show some similarity in the patterns of critique that are mobilized. In fact, only political co-operators seem actually to display less diversity in their overall response, with a consistent recourse to either the civic order in its pure form or strong critiques directed at the market expressed from the civic world. With the notable exception of McPherson and Sauder (2013), whose study of a drug court tracks the influence of four different logics, researchers interested in individual responses to pluralism have so far limited their analysis to the presence of two logics only. For instance, in their study of Lloyd's, Smets and colleagues (2015) focus on the market and community logics, which they identify at the outset as the two logics exerting influence over their setting. Based on our findings, which show that co-operators for sure draw dominantly on the market and civic worlds but also at times on the industrial and domestic ones, we may assume that the market and community logics do not exhaust all the work situations encountered by Lloyd's underwriters and that including other less salient logics in the analysis of their responses to pluralism may enrich our understanding thereof. We thus suggest that, in the study of individual responses to pluralism, the attention also turns to the influence of pools or constellations of logics (Goodrick and Reay, 2011), as it is already the case when pluralism is studied at the field and organizational levels.

### *Contributions to co-operative studies*

Besides its contributions to research on individual responses to pluralism, our study finally brings a fourth set of contributions, this time in relation to research on worker co-operatives. First, our proposed typology provides a mapping that usefully delineates the range of possibilities found in co-operators' interpretations of co-operative principles. This mapping helps to further our understanding of the co-operative movement as a diverse movement in which co-operators, while adhering to a shared set of principles, promote rather varied conceptions of co-operation. It is especially important to stress the presence within the co-operative movement of co-operators of the pragmatic kind in that it makes a correction to the biased vision according to which worker co-operatives would be only composed of activist co-operators such as those to whom we have applied the label of political co-operators (see also Varman and Chakrabarti, 2004). Since this biased vision is the inevitable outcome of scholars' own selection bias towards the most committed co-operators, it underlines how important it is for future research to pay attention to those mundane forms of co-operation in which proselytism is largely absent from the personal characteristics of involved co-operators.

Second, our observations provide interesting insights on how it is possible for co-operators to deal with the tensions that normally arise from the coexistence of seemingly antithetic principles such as those of concern for community (principle 7) and member benefit (principle 8) (Birchall, 2005). Pragmatic co-operators simply deny the existence of these tensions by dismissing the principle of concern for community. Reformist co-operators overcome these tensions by extending the notion of member benefit to the advantages stemming from the democratic functioning of the organization, reformulating in so doing member benefit in terms of advantages that are not encroached upon by the principle of concern for community. Finally, political co-operators, while they would seem at first sight to focus quasi-exclusively on community benefit at the expense of member benefit, also succeed in actually overcoming the tensions between the two principles because their orientation towards the common good becomes a reward in itself. For the two last types of co-operators, original solutions are thus found so as to resolve the tensions inherent in the presence of two antithetic principles without negating any of them.

### *Conclusion*

The purpose of this paper was to contribute to the further understanding of individual responses to pluralism. Drawing on theoretical insights from the sociology of conventions, we looked at the various modes of justification publicly advanced by representatives of French worker co-operatives when substantiating their positions towards co-operative principles. By doing so, we identified three main types of French co-operators – pragmatic, reformist and political – all of which are built on distinct kinds of critiques and compromises. In our study, we decided to take seriously the call of the sociology of convention for a more micro approach to organizational phenomena, and focused for these reasons on situations where actors are engaged in public justification (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1999).

Our study shows that the sociology of conventions has relevance for organizational research. While this framework has already been applied to the study of mutual banks (Rousselière and Vézina, 2009; Wissler, 1989), this is to our knowledge the first time it has been used in the study of worker co-operatives. Whereas its usage has been acknowledged mainly for studying organizational compromises between competing orders of worth (Jagd, 2011), it also offers huge scope for the study of more nuanced approaches of pluralism and ambiguity (Beunza and Stark, 2004; Girard and Stark, 2003; Stark, 2000, 2009). In these research domains, the sociology of conventions may indeed play an instrumental role in filling some of the blind spots of new institutionalism (Cloutier and Langley, 2013; Daudigeos and Valiorgue, 2010; Gond and Leca, 2012; McInerney, 2008). But we also see in the concept of critique a promising avenue for illuminating some aspects of organizational change. We already have some insights into the role played by criticism in macro-societal changes (see Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Chiapello, 2013 and the literature on social movements) but still actually know very little about the effects that critiques expressed by actors in daily work situations have on organizations (Bourguignon and Chiapello, 2005).

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**Table 1: Main theoretical stances on organizational members' responses to pluralism**

|                   | - | Strategic use of logics  | +  |
|-------------------|---|--|--|
| Ready-made logics | - |  | <p>(Smets et al., 2015; Smets and Jarzabkowski, 2013; Voronov et al., 2013)</p> <p><i>Actors must be selective not only in which logic to adhere to, but also, possibly, in how to adhere to a particular logic (Voronov et al., 2013: 1564)</i></p> <p><i>Competing institutional logics are not fixed in some structural order but are continuously and flexibly instantiated in the momentary processes by which individuals adjust to any given situation (Smets et al., 2015: 937)</i></p> <p><b>Inhabited logics</b></p> |
|                   | + | <p>(Almandoz, 2014; Battilana and Dorado, 2010; Marquis and Tilcsik, 2013)</p> <p><i>Prior involvement with institutional logics has shaped people's assumptions and values (...). Such conditioning transforms them into "carriers" of those institutional influences (Almandoz, 2014: 443)</i></p> <p><b>Embodied logics</b></p> | <p>(McPherson and Sauder, 2013)<br/>(Bullinger et al., 2015)</p> <p><i>Available logics closely resemble tools that can be creatively employed by actors to achieve individual and organizational goals. (McPherson and Sauder, 2013: 165)</i></p> <p><b>Logics as strategic tools</b></p>   |



**Table 2: Overview of French co-operators' individual responses to their shared set of diverse values and principles**

|  | <b>Pragmatic co-operator</b>  | <b>Reformist co-operator</b>  | <b>Political co-operator</b>   |
|--|---|---|--|
| <b>2. Democratic Member Control:</b><br><br><i>articulation of the civic and industrial worlds</i>   | <b>Formal democracy: c/u</b><br><br><i>If we want it to work properly (...), we will not spend our time in discussion.</i>  | <b>Assisted democracy: c-u</b><br><br><i>You need instead to cultivate democracy. (...) Otherwise, if you let it go, you end up with an organization the same as any other.</i> | <b>Self-management: c</b><br><br><i>Behind [the question of self-management or at least of expansive involvement in management], there is actually a vision of humans. That is to say, people at work can be autonomous.</i> |
| <b>3. Member Economic Participation</b><br><br><i>articulation of the civic and market worlds</i>    | <b>Employee-ownership capitalism: m–c</b><br><br><i>I don't see any difficulty in having both [capitalist and co-operative] systems operating at the same time.</i> | <b>Responsible capitalism: m/m; m/u; m/d; m/c</b><br><br><i>[The financialization of the economy] really raises the question about what we want to do with enterprises.</i>     | <b>Anti-capitalism: m//c</b><br><br><i>I am anti-capitalist and I state it very clearly.</i>   |
| <b>6. Co-operation among Co-operatives</b><br><br><i>articulation of the civic and market worlds</i> | <b>Opportunist co-operation: m–c</b><br><br><i>We realized that there are 2,000 SCOP in France (...) it is a rather amazing market opportunity.</i>                 | <b>Protective co-operation: m/m; m/u; m/d; m/c</b><br><br><i>Co-operative systems where we pool resources (...) allow a better critical size to be reached.</i>                 | <b>Systemic co-operation: m//c</b><br><br><i>[It is about] being able to live logics that are not win-lose but win-win, in a system of co-operation, and not in one of competition and rivalry.</i>                          |
| <b>7. Concern for Community &amp; 8. Member</b>  | <b>Priority to member benefit: c–m</b><br><br><i>[The co-operative movement] offers some individuals the chance to work for themselves</i>                          | <b>Balance between member and community benefits: (c–m)–(c–d); m/(c–d)</b><br><br><i>[Co-operative status] has been a guarantee of</i>  | <b>Priority to community benefit: c; m//c</b><br><br><i>With income, we create social links, solidarity, social protection. This is costly but</i>   |



|   |                                   |                        |                       |
|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Benefit</b><br><br><i>distinct instantiations of the civic world</i> | <i>and for their own benefit.</i> | <i>sustainability.</i> | <i>we take it on.</i> |
|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|

**Key:**

Orders of worth: d = domestic, c = civic, m = market, u = industrial; Critique: m/c = soft critique of the market world by the civic world, m//c = strong critique of the market world by the civic world; Compromise: c-m = compromise between the civic and market worlds

**Annex 1: The Orders of Worth and Associated Features. Source: Gond & Leca 2012, adapted from Boltanski and Thévenot (2006, pp. 159–211), Thévenot, Moody and Lafaye (2000, p. 241)\*, Boltanski and Chiapello (1999, pp. 161–192)\*\*.**

| 'Common worlds'                   | Market                                    | Industrial  | Civic   | Domestic                              | Inspired  | Fame                              | Green*   | Project**   |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| <b>Mode of evaluation (worth)</b> | Price, cost                               | Technical efficiency                                    | Collective welfare  | Esteem, reputation                    | Grace, singularity, creativeness                | Renown, fame                      | <i>Environmental friendliness</i>                                | <i>Connection, Flexibility, Adaptability</i>      |
| <b>Test</b>                       | Market competitiveness                    | Competence, reliability, planning                       | Equality and solidarity                                     | Trustworthiness                       | Passion, enthusiasm                             | Popularity, audience, recognition | <i>Sustainability, renewability</i>                              | <i>Transition from one project to another</i>     |
| <b>Form of relevant proof</b>     | Monetary                                  | Measurable: criteria, statistics                        | Formal, official  | Oral, exemplary, personally warranted | Emotional involvement and expression            | Semiotic                          | <i>Ecological ecosystem</i>                                      | <i>Reputation</i>                                 |
| <b>Qualified objects</b>          | Freely circulating market good or service | Infrastructure, project, technical object, method, plan | Rules and regulations, fundamental rights, welfare policies | Patrimony, locale, heritage           | Emotionally invested body or item, the sublime  | Sign, media                       | <i>Pristine wilderness, healthy environment, natural habitat</i> | <i>Project, networks</i>                          |
| <b>Qualified human beings</b>     | Customer, consumer, merchant, seller      | Engineer, professional, expert                          | Equal citizens, solidarity unions                           | Authority                             | Creative Beings, artists                        | Celebrity                         | <i>Environmentalists, ecologists</i>                             | <i>High social capital, adaptable individuals</i> |
| <b>Time formation</b>             | Short-term, flexibility                   | Long-term planned future                                | Perennial   | Customary part                        | Eschatological, revolutionary, visionary moment | Vogue, trend                      | <i>Future generations</i>  | <i>Time of the project</i>                        |
| <b>Space formation</b>            | Globalization                             | Cartesian space   | Detachment  | Local, proximal anchoring             | Presence  | Communication network             | <i>Planet ecosystem</i>  | <i>Network</i>                                    |



## **Annex 2: Co-operative identity, values & principles (ICA, 1995)**

### **Definition**

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

### **Values**

Co-operatives are based on the values of **self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity** and **solidarity**. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

### **Principles**

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

#### **1. Voluntary and Open Membership**

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

#### **2. Democratic Member Control**

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

#### **3. Member Economic Participation**

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefiting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

#### **4. Autonomy and Independence**

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

#### **5. Education, Training and Information**

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public – particularly young people and opinion leaders – about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

## **6. Co-operation among Co-operatives**

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

## **7. Concern for Community**

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.

### **Annex 3: Description of participants**

| <b>Status</b>                                  | <b>Number</b> | <b>Organization</b>                                   |
|--|---------------|---|
| Co-operators                                   | 1             | Co-operative 1  |
|  | 1             | Co-operative 2  |
|  | 1             | Co-operative 3  |
|  | 1             | Co-operative 4  |
|  | 1             | Co-operative 5  |
|  | 1             | Co-operative 6  |
|  | 3             | Co-operative 7  |
| Representatives<br>of support<br>organizations | 1             | Co-operative bank                                     |
|  | 1             | Local public authority in charge of social<br>economy |
|  | 1             | URSCOP  |
| Consultants                                    | 1             | Consulting firm 1                                     |
|  | 1             | Consulting firm 2                                     |
| Scholars                                       | 8             | Business school                                       |



#### Annex 4: Description of worker co-operatives

| Organization   | Number of representatives | Activity                | Creation or transmission | SCOP (Y/N) | Creation date | Headcount (of which associate workers) |
|----------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------|---------------|--|
| <b>Co-op 1</b> | 1                         | Editing                 | Creation                 | N          | 1972          | 7                                      |
| <b>Co-op 2</b> | 1                         | Information technology  | Creation                 | Y          | 1979          | 80 (80)                                |
| <b>Co-op 3</b> | 1                         | Business and employment | Creation                 | Y          | 2003          | 50 (30)                                |
| <b>Co-op 4</b> | 1                         | Business and employment | Creation                 | Y          | 2004          | 300 (80)                               |
| <b>Co-op 5</b> | 1                         | Biotechnologies         | Creation                 | Y          | 2008          | 7 (5)                                  |
| <b>Co-op 6</b> | 1                         | Chocolate production    | Creation                 | Y          | 2010          | 7 (4)                                  |
| <b>Co-op 7</b> | 3                         | Accountancy             | Transmission             | Ongoing    | Ongoing       | 60                                     |





# **DEUXIEME ARTICLE**



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**Preventing chiefs from being chiefs: An ethnography of a co-operative sheet-metal factory**

**Abstract:** What remains of power and resistance within organisations such as worker co-operatives, where the application of democratic principles supposedly favours both equality and the voicing of workers' claims? In order to investigate this question, the present study is based on a piece of ethnographic work, namely one year of participant observation as a factory worker, which I conducted within a French co-operative sheet-metal factory. Pondering the presence within the co-operative of seemingly powerless chiefs, I draw on the works of French anthropologist Pierre Clastres (1934–1977) on stateless societies in order to study co-operators in their 'continual effort to prevent chiefs from being chiefs' (Clastres, 1987: 218). Three forms of daily struggle around power relations appear to be central for members of the co-operative in circumventing the coalescence of power in the hands of their chiefs: a relentlessly voiced refusal of the divide between chiefs and lay members; a permanent requirement for accountability, and endless overt critique towards chiefs; and the use of schoolboy humour. In reflecting on such practices, I aim to contribute to the critical study of power and resistance, ultimately endorsing the view that power relations are the contingent outcome of contextual configurations of practices. In these configurations, power and resistance cease to be readily discernible (rather than resistance being considered a detached reaction to power), and the related role assignments are constantly shifting (rather than power being the fixed attribute of managers, and resistance that of subordinate workers). Additionally, it suggests that such configurations of practices may well rely on little-equipped and little-formalised mechanisms – rather than on sophisticated technologies, which are usually the privilege of management only.

**Keywords:** Pierre Clastres; power; resistance; organisational democracy; worker co-operatives; ethnography



Within organisation studies, resistance has traditionally been associated with the efforts of subordinates to oppose or circumvent the forms of control devised by their superordinates (Fleming and Spicer, 2007). In line with the tradition of Labour Process Theory, this opposition was first understood as fundamentally rooted in the antagonism between capital and labour, the focus being put on their objectively divergent interests resulting from capitalist modes of production (Braverman, 1998[1974]; Edwards, 1979). Then, with the subjective turn occurring in the 1990s, a second tradition emerged. In this, resistance was gradually reinterpreted as the outcome of the contextual engagement of workers in the construction of selves or collective identities that are not necessarily congruent with those that their organisation tries to impose upon them (Collinson, 1992; Kondo, 1990). This gives way to manifestations of resistance that are often now more covert than overt (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Fleming and Sewell, 2002). The question may thus be raised: what in fact is left of power and resistance in organisations such as worker co-operatives? In such organisations, not only is antagonism between labour and capital absent (thus definitively removing the Marxist take on objectively divergent interests), but also the application of democratic principles normally favours the voicing of workers' claims and the overt assertion of competing identities (Cheney et al., 2014; Webb and Cheney, 2014). In investigating this question, I aim to contribute further to the critical study of power and resistance, as developed in this tradition. To that purpose, the present study draws on a piece of ethnographic work, namely one year of participant observation as a factory worker, which I conducted within a co-operative.

### **Factory work in the co-operative sheet-metal factory**

Scopix<sup>12</sup> is a sheet-metal factory that is located in France and was incorporated as a worker co-operative some 30 years ago. At that time, the owner and boss of the company that then existed decided to close down the factory. The workers picketed it for several weeks until they were eventually offered the opportunity to run the business as a co-operative. After a couple of difficult years, during which employees frequently worked for no pay at the weekend in order to avoid bankruptcy, Scopix found itself in a position to support the rapid development of one of its customers, thus securing the activity and profitability of the co-operative. Scopix now comprises 25 worker-associates and has a yearly turnover of circa

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<sup>12</sup> This name is an alias, as are the names of the co-operators.

€2.5m, with this customer still being its main one and accounting for nearly half its sales. Typical products include electrical boxes or cabinets, control panels and various mechanical parts, with sheets of aluminium, steel and stainless steel being processed, based on customers' technical blueprints.

The shop floor is divided into three main sections (in order of process flow): cutting (stamping and laser cutting), bending, and welding plus assembly. Sheet-metal work is a physically demanding job, with most tasks requiring workers to stand up all day, and frequently to handle heavy and cumbersome parts. Consequently, many workers, even the youngest, suffer from chronic back problems. In addition, the shop floor is very noisy, and some of the tasks are either dirty (due to the metal dust from grinding and deburring) or dangerous (for example, bending, where one worker cut off the tip of one finger during my time at the factory), not to mention repetitive. Masculinity (Collinson, 1992) is another dominant feature of Scopix, with the shop-floor workers being exclusively men. This tends to be reinforced by the ancestry of workers, most of whom originate from Southern European and North African countries (Italy, Portugal, Spain, Algeria, Tunisia etc.), where this cultural trait is even more prevalent than in France.

All current workers are associates, except for a few trainees and temporary workers, the rule in force being that workers usually become associates after they have completed their first year of employment. The company is 100% owned by its employees, with no support from external associates ever having been needed. Scopix functions with a supervisory board (composed of three members elected by the associates for a six-year term) and an executive board (three voluntary members designated by the supervisory board for a four-year term). All three members of the supervisory board are currently shop-floor workers. While the previous executive board was composed of two functional managers (accounting and sales) and one shop-floor worker, the new board (designated in 2013) is now predominantly composed of shop-floor workers, with just one of its members splitting his time between office activities (programming for cutting machines) and shop-floor work (cutting). This feature – i.e. the existence of an executive board that is composed of members whose term is quite short and tends not to be renewed, and that includes lay workers – is in itself a strong marker of Scopix's distinctiveness among French worker co-operatives. Organisations of a comparable size are almost all run by a general manager who happens to be a professional manager and whose term of office often extends over a long timeframe (Bataille-Chedotel and Huntzinger, 2004). This testifies for Scopix's pronounced interest in egalitarianism, an

interest that is also reflected in the limited wage-differential scale (approximately 1:2) and in the fact that profit-sharing bonuses are not defined in proportion to salaries but are distributed equally.

My engagement with the factory was as an unpaid trainee over a one-year period, from September 2013 to September 2014, filling in for various vacancies on jobs that are less demanding in terms of skills. I started with the job that is considered the most basic on the shop floor, that is grinding and deburring, and then progressively took on others, such as tapping, milling, and plugging of metal inserts and studs. I was also able to work on the stamping and bending equipment, provided the machine had already been set up by a skilled worker. In fact, bending on a press brake soon became one of my most frequent assignments, since I apparently displayed less clumsiness in this, as well as genuine affinity for the task. My specific status also allowed me to attend as many meetings as I wished. In particular, I systematically attended the weekly meeting of the executive committee (*réunion de directoire*), which takes place every Tuesday after the end of the working day; during this, committee members review the main issues, make decisions, and see co-operators who wish to make complaints. I also attended all the individual interviews organised by the new executive committee at the beginning of its term so as to get feedback from the associates about their priorities. Other opportunities to engage further with my co-workers came in the form of lunch breaks (usually in the shared kitchen or at barbecues organised in front of the factory during spring and summer), and going out with single men of all ages at the weekend.

If conditions of access to the field are revealing of the group under study (Favret-Saada, 1977; Geertz, 1973), I must confess that my access to Scopix was surprisingly easy. It was granted, despite my presenting a rather vague objective at the time, after a single interview with one member of the former executive board, whose decision was immediately validated by her co-members on the board. And while I was afraid that the new executive board – which was designated after I had gained this agreement but before I had actually started my fieldwork – might question a decision made by their predecessors, they reiterated their agreement after a brief meeting. During my stay, I was never refused the opportunity to participate in any meeting, even including those on sensitive matters (for instance, giving a warning to an associate), and most of the time was even kindly informed when an unexpected meeting was organised on the spot. Whenever I expressed surprise about my presence being so easily accepted, for instance in the previously mentioned individual interviews, which included



personal information (all workers agreeing to my attending, and all except one to having the interview recorded), the recurring motto was: ‘We’ve nothing to hide here.’

What rapidly emerged as one of the most striking features of Scopix is that there is little evidence of hierarchical power. This view is shared by members of the co-operative, whether they have spent their entire career at Scopix or have had the opportunity to experience other work environments. Within the co-operative, the organisation is, admittedly, formalised – and the existence of a certain amount of hierarchy is recognised. It is even possible to consult an organisation chart, which provides official and material evidence of this. However, this does not translate into the exertion of much power and authority by chiefs<sup>13</sup> towards their subordinates. Membership of the supervisory board is considered – and in fact works as – a purely honorific position, mostly a measure of one’s popularity among colleagues. Although very active, members of the executive committee have great difficulty in imprinting their own orientations on actual operations. Similarly, the foreman and other managers have little chance to implement changes that are not already in line with members’ wishes.

While elements of Scopix’s governance design are likely to provide some of the necessary structural conditions for such a phenomenon – that is, the presence of (largely) powerless chiefs – they do not explain the actual mechanisms by which chiefs are effectively rendered powerless. It is precisely these mechanisms that I strived to uncover, as well as their implications for our understanding of power and resistance. The works of Pierre Clastres on primitive societies were the first to conceive of a chieftainship that was in essence separated from power and authority. Therefore I interpreted my own empirical observations as an invitation to carry us away from the French co-operative sheet-metal factory to the South-American Indian tribes with which Clastres was so familiar, and thus to travel back in time from the present to the 1960s.

### **Pierre Clastres and the primitive societies: ‘a chieftainship without authority’**

A French anthropologist, Clastres (1934–1977) studied (in his fieldwork) Indian tribes in Paraguay and Brazil, including the Guayaki, the Guaraní and the Chulupi (Clastres, 2011). In one of his major works, *Society against the state* (1987) – originally *La Société contre l’Etat*

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<sup>13</sup> I chose the term ‘chiefs’, despite its being somewhat vague in English, to refer to the people whom members of the co-operative designate (similarly vaguely) ‘les responsables’ (literally, those who have responsibilities). In the minds of co-operative members, this usually includes the three members of the executive board, the foreman and the four functional managers (accounting, sales, technical and engineering managers), but may contextually designate one of these categories only.

(1974)<sup>14</sup> – Clastres shows that while primitive<sup>15</sup> societies are indeed stateless, this absence must certainly not be interpreted as a lack, as too often suggested by an ethnocentric view that considers the state as the desirable aim for any society. Rather, this absence marks the victory of societies that in essence seek independence and thus refuse to submit to state power (Clastres, 1987, 1994; see also Scott, 2009 for a Clastrian perspective on another geographic and historic context).

Besides this objective of external policy, i.e. to preserve their independence, primitive societies have a second political objective, one of internal policy, which is to preserve their social homogeneity:

The same rigorous logic determines both the internal policy and external policy of primitive society [...] the community wants to persevere in its undivided being and prevent a unifying authority – the figure of the commanding chief – from separating itself from the social body and introducing social division between Master and Subjects. (Clastres, 1994: 165)

Thus, what Clastres studies are the means by which primitive societies have prevented the emergence of a central authority, allowing only the ‘bizarre persistence of a “power” that is practically powerless, of a chieftainship without authority, of a function operating in a void’ (Clastres, 1987: 29). So why have a chief then? Because, in a move that is reminiscent of Freeman’s (2013[1970]) warning against the ‘tyranny of structurelessness’, Indian societies have decided that power is better kept at bay by being named and embodied in the figure of a chief, rather than simply by being ignored:

For, on discovering the great affinity of power and nature, as the twofold limitation of the domain of culture, Indian societies were able to create a means for neutralizing the virulence of political authority. They chose themselves to be the founders of that authority, but in such a manner as to let power appear only as a negativity that is immediately subdued: they established it in keeping with its essence (the negation of culture), but precisely in order to strip it of any real might. Thus, the advent of power,

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<sup>14</sup> The book is actually a collection of articles previously published through various outlets, such as *Critique*, *L’Homme*, *Les Temps Modernes* and *L’Éphémère*.

<sup>15</sup> In casually referring to ‘primitive societies’ and later on to ‘Savages’, I choose to be faithful to Clastres’ own words, upon which he was of course conferring a highly ironic tone, since the key aim of his work was to show just how elaborate the functioning of these societies (especially their political system) actually was.

such as it is, presents itself to these societies as the very means for nullifying that power. (Clastres, 1987: 44–45)

The sole exclusive privilege that is usually recognised to the Indian chief is that of polygamy (Clastres, 1987: 32). In return, the chief must provide the group with goods and words, being generous with possessions (seldom being able to reject the relentless requests emanating from the group) and with speaking (thus being expected to be a good orator). Notwithstanding the fact that the words of the chief may be meaningless and often not even listened to, they are nonetheless demanded (Clastres, 2000). As Clastres puts it, ‘if in societies with a State speech is power’s *right*, in societies without a State speech is power’s *duty*’ (Clastres, 1987: 153). Within primitive societies, these elements of the cycle of exchange are of utmost importance for annihilating the power of chiefs. For instance, the ‘obligation to give, to which the chief is bound, is experienced by the Indians as a kind of right to subject him to a continuous looting’ (Clastres, 1987: 30). In a similar vein, ‘the chief’s obligation to speak, that steady flow of empty speech that he *owes* the tribe, is his infinite debt, the guarantee that prevents the man of speech from becoming a man of power’ (Clastres, 1987: 154–155).

What Clastres makes eventually visible through his study of South-American Indian tribes is the Savages’ ‘continual effort to prevent chiefs from being chiefs’ (Clastres, 1987: 218), understood as a means of maintaining the homogeneity of the group. He points out that the political goals of primitive societies, namely their independence and the homogeneity of their social body, can be met only because relentless work goes on in the group to put power at bay. Turning back to Scopix<sup>16</sup>, the French co-operative sheet-metal factory, I thus similarly tried to appreciate the kind of activities that were performed by its members so as to prevent the locus of chieftainship being confounded with that of power.

### **Preventing chiefs from being chiefs within Scopix**

Three types of daily activities appear as central for members of the co-operative to avoid the coalescence of power in the hands of its chiefs. First, co-operators relentlessly voice their refusal of a divide between chiefs and lay members. This contributes to reaffirming a group culture in which there is limited room for hierarchical power. Second, co-operators express permanent criticism and requests for accountability towards chiefs. This puts them in infinite

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<sup>16</sup> The societies studied by Clastres were small in size (Clastres, 2012: 33), thus justifying the potential relevance of his observations to an organisation such as Scopix. For instance, the two Guyaki communities that he was able to observe at length comprised 30 and 70 members (Clastres, 2000).

debt towards members, a situation that conspicuously contradicts their exerting power. Third, co-operators use schoolboy humour to undermine chiefs' credibility and to limit their claims to authority.

### ***Refusal of the divide***

The first type of activities performed by co-operators to prevent chiefs from being chiefs is relentlessly to voice their refusal of a divide between chiefs and lay members. In this sense, it can be said that co-operators share a political objective that is similar to that of primitive societies, namely preserving the homogeneity of the group. One of the most visible activities aimed at doing just that lies in the daily interactions between shop-floor workers and chiefs. It is quite common to hear the former reminding the latter that they are ultimately all associates, and thus need to be considered on an equal footing. The following exchange, which took place during the individual interview with Raymond, an operator from the cutting section, is illustrative of such practice:

Olivier, member of the executive board: When Bernard [the workshop foreman] gives you an order, you ...

Raymond, interrupting him: I am not given orders, I'm an associate here!

Olivier: Uh ... well, I mean ... uh ... when you are provided with some work instruction by Bernard, you ...

The shop-floor worker actually made the member of the executive board reframe his sentence, thus producing a periphrasis that now partly conceals the hierarchical relation that is supposed to link him with the workshop foreman. While I had thought, at the very beginning of my fieldwork, that this kind of behaviour was the privilege of senior workers – although Raymond is quite young, he has been working at Scopix for more than ten years and is clearly identified as one of Scopix's 'loudmouths' – I rapidly came to realise that less senior workers could engage in similar practices. Once, while I was milling alongside Marc, a rather discreet worker, he replied to the foreman's multiple requests as follows:

Marc, with a slight smile and speaking in a pleasant tone: Don't start playing the boss, Bernard ...

Bernard, also pleasantly but with a slight touch of exasperation: I am not playing the boss, I AM your boss!

The conversation ended up with Marc confirming that he would proceed as per Bernard's requests ('I'll take care of it'), but enunciating this in a tone that conspicuously meant that he would be doing it only because he himself was willing to do it, as if he were doing Bernard a favour.

The affirmation of the refusal of the divide between chiefs and lay members may also take a playful form. At times, I could hear shop-floor workers shouting out to each other:

Worker A, shouting with a carefully studied varying pitch: WHO is the BOSS?

Worker B, in the same manner: It's ME! I'M the BOSS!

As a consequence of its frequent occurrence, I eventually asked who had initiated this game, which I took to be a private joke based on some past work event. I was in fact referred to a well-known TV commercial (I do not watch much television, which explained my ignorance) by a car rental company, where superior service is supposed to put the customer in the boss's shoes<sup>17</sup>. When playing this game, members of Scopix are merely reminding each other of a basic co-operative principle, i.e. everyone is a boss in such an organisation, since everyone has ownership. However, this takes a particular flavour in the case of Scopix, insofar as it leads lay members frequently to oppose the claims for authority put forth by chiefs. One day, I heard a nearby worker playing the game by himself, saying out loud, 'WHO is the BOSS? It's ME! I'M the BOSS!' while on the job, which made me smile. However, I could not help thinking that this was perhaps not simply the meaningless by-product of the performance of a very repetitive task, but rather a way to make sure, by ritually repeating it to oneself, that something essential would not be forgotten, i.e. the refusal to accept that the group be divided into those who command and those who obey.

Another telling episode, which is very significant in terms of how the refusal of the divide between lay members and chiefs may be expressed, relates to the management of functional managers' extra hours. During 2013, all office workers started to clock in as a result of the pressures emanating from the shop floor in favour of such move. While it had, until then, been considered technically too difficult to implement clocking-in for office workers because of their non-standardised schedules, this was contested by a few shop-floor workers, who issued a petition arguing that they could not see why they themselves should clock in if some associates did not have to do so. This forced the executive board of the time to organise a

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<sup>17</sup> To see the commercial with English subtitles: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sulaJIjwgGI>

consultation, in which a majority of associates supported clocking-in for all. Unsurprisingly, when a first assessment of the new system was made at the end of 2013, all functional managers happened to be credited with a huge number of extra hours. I was thus offered the opportunity to attend a rather tense meeting, during which the new executive board, unwilling to authorise these extra hours to be paid, proposed that the functional managers should ‘wipe the slate clean’ for the past year and make sure from then on that they could stick to their 35-hour week contract. Functional managers violently opposed having their hours written off:

Pierrick, engineering manager, very annoyed: What?! Are you taking the piss out of us? For more than seven years now, I have performed hundreds of extra hours without claiming any extra pay. We are not the ones who asked to clock in. They [the shop-floor workers] asked for it, so now they have to suck it up!

If one considers this episode from an economic perspective, it is simply incomprehensible. What is the point of asking managers to work shorter hours when they have, until now – for more than ten years, in the case of the most senior – systematically accepted working overtime without claiming any extra pay? From the erroneous perspective of utilitarian calculation, I myself at first read the whole exchange as an expression of the co-operators’ taste for creating problems where there initially were none. However, once one seriously accepts that Scopix follows not only economic objectives but also political ones – of which the primacy is regularly recognised – the story no longer appears as an anomaly. Once one accepts that the co-operative is in essence defined by its will to avoid having the chiefs separating from the social body and thus introducing division into the group, the discourse of the executive board becomes transparent:

Michel, member of the executive board: I see no reason why you would need to work more than 35 hours a week. No one is indispensable. Your working contract is for 35 hours! So we understand that you may need to do some extra hours to deal with some unevenness in your workload from time to time, but these hours should eventually be recovered. If you are shown to be doing extra hours in the long run, this means that we are badly organised and that something has to be changed.

As can be seen through these examples, the relentless efforts aimed at preserving the homogeneity of the group are mostly accomplished by shop-floor workers and directed towards chiefs. They can also, as in the case of the clocking-in, be found among the executive board, directed at functional managers, or vice versa. These practices contribute to constantly reaffirming a group culture where there is, in the end, limited room for power to be exerted by

the hierarchy. Indeed, chiefs know that any action or wording that would too conspicuously testify to their authority runs the risk of immediately being contested. And consequently, they know that they have a better chance of meeting their objectives when these already match the objectives of the shop-floor workers, and that the task of convincing the latter cannot be overlooked where this is not yet the case.

To be clear, while such practices tend to subdue the threat of a divide between chiefs and shop-floor workers, they do not fully shield the group from being affected by some division. The shop floor itself is not devoid of an occupational hierarchy that, for instance, situates deburring and grinding at the very bottom. Objectively, the job is no more repetitive and imposes no more physical strain than many others, but it is probably its dirtiness that lets it down: after my first two weeks, during which I had done it full time, every time I was asked by the foreman to perform it again, he practically apologised, and I could be sure to hear mocking comments from my co-workers, such as: ‘That’s it, you’ve fallen back to the very bottom!’ Similarly, within their sections, bending and welding workers are ranked from P1 to P3, according to their skills and the extent to which they are able to deal with difficult parts. This process of differentiation is accepted by all as a necessary consequence of each order being allocated to one worker, but is nonetheless not devoid of some safeguards. For instance, all workers (i.e. not only the most skilled) are supposed to get involved in the prototyping process, and the perception of repeated exceptions to this implicit rule led in the past to the work of one perceivedly favoured worker being sabotaged.

### ***Overt critique and requests for accountability***

A second dimension in the work performed by members of Scopix to prevent chiefs from being chiefs consists of submitting them to permanent criticism and requests for accountability. These activities are especially visible when it comes to the executive board. As soon as its members get to the shop floor after leaving a meeting, workers tend to ask them about the outcomes, demanding that they justify the decisions taken, which are criticised whenever they do not match workers’ own views. When topics deemed very sensitive are at stake, such activities multiply. For instance, one day, the realisation that a regular bonus had been awarded by the previous board to one of their co-workers triggered some frenetic criticism from workers who considered it undeserved, the worker concerned being said not to fulfil the tasks that initially served to justify the bonus award. Although board members were in this case simply inheriting a problem that they had not themselves contributed to creating,

they were subjected to a relentless flow of questions and criticism, demanding that they justify either why they had not yet suppressed such an unfair bonus or, conversely, why they intended to suppress someone's acquired benefit. I could see that operations were seriously disturbed during that day, at the end of which Kevin, the youngest member of the board, uttered with a sigh: 'I feel like I spent my entire day answering their questions.'

Interestingly, I regularly observed that being sure of the facts was not a prerequisite for members' criticism of chiefs. For instance, in the example of the worker's bonus mentioned above, I could hear some workers criticising the board for having suppressed the bonus, although I knew the decision was still pending. Consequently, in a lot of cases, when the board was coming under attack, its job was mostly about re-establishing the truth. Since I had noticed that the board was quite transparent, providing members with the available information when requested, I first wondered why workers did not simply question board members more systematically when they wanted to know something. I came to realise that, from the co-operators' perspective, this was not necessarily desirable, because what mattered to them was first and foremost the act of criticising, independently of its content. Limiting oneself to solid information would tend only to limit the range of criticism available to them. I received some level of confirmation of this interpretation when asking members of the executive board why they did not organise some brief ad-hoc information meetings on the shop floor in order to avoid the diffusion of gossip. They smiled at each other, so underlining the naivety of my question, before one of them replied:

That would not change anything. Even at the Annual General Meeting, you can see that no more than five minutes after the end, there is already some gossip going on.

Indeed, I noticed, for instance, that the minutes of the weekly executive-board meetings, which are posted close to the coffee machine, were seldom read. While one could conclude from this that criticising is, for Scopix members, an end in itself, such a conclusion would in fact be inaccurate: rather, it is one of various means that co-operators use to limit chiefs' power. Indeed, the continuous flow of criticism and of requests for accountability that targets the board members keeps them alert not to go beyond their mandate. For instance, at the end of his individual interview (with the new executive committee, to get feedback from associates), Roger (who works in delivery) continued his discussion with the board for some time. As one of the most senior workers, Roger was keen to insist that 'executive-board members [had] always been spared within Scopix' and that they were always given some scope to act in accordance with their own personal interests. Although I cannot testify to the



situation when previous boards were in place, I found his statement astonishing with respect to my own observations of the current board and its relations with other members. In stark contrast to Roger's view, what I found very striking was the cautiousness displayed by board members in avoiding any decision that may arouse the least suspicion of seeking to favour themselves – including a case where extending the responsibilities of one of the board members, although seemingly the most logical solution to the problem at hand, was dismissed. I interpret this cautiousness as a direct result of the pressurising activities exerted by co-operators, as previously described. In this sense, Roger's comments are probably best understood as if he were describing not what was happening but rather what should not happen – and, by so doing, contributing to having the threat of which he warned more surely averted.

Besides the executive board, other chiefs can be similarly targeted by this continuous work of criticising and demanding accountability. Raymond, one of the workers from the cutting section, who had repeatedly had arguments with the foreman in the preceding weeks, eventually decided to join the executive board's weekly meeting in order to reiterate his grievances. He started by mentioning that he would raise only things that he had already directly complained about to the foreman ('I've told him already'), thus making it clear that what he was looking for was, above all, some sort of arbitration in his favour. He then complained that the foreman was always 'on his back' and constantly making 'digs' at him in order to detract from the perceived value of his work. He asked for a daily schedule to be provided to him so that he could work in an autonomous way, instead of being repeatedly bothered by the foreman's changing priorities. Finally, he criticised the board for taking sides too often with the foreman and stated that he was speaking not only for himself but for his entire section. Having talked for some 30 minutes, almost without being interrupted, he looked at his watch and suddenly stood up: 'F\*\*\*, it's already 5.40 pm! My wife will kill me!' He hurried out of the room, only to poke his head back round the door to proclaim his conclusion: 'In short, he'd better stop pissing me off!'

If members of Scopix appear to be more afraid of their wives than of their chiefs, this is probably because their experience suggests that it is in fact easier to have the upper hand with the latter. On the day after Raymond's intervention at the executive-board meeting, I worked all day within his section and could hear him trying at length to convince his co-workers of the foreman's mistreatment of him and others, as well as conveying his mistrust of the executive board. At that stage, I realised that Raymond's lobbying echoed his mates' concerns

only partially, and that he had been getting a little ahead of himself when claiming, the day before, that he was expressing the general opinion. However, when such lobbying does more closely reflect the feelings of the shop-floor workers, it has genuine consequences. Bernard, the current foreman, had in fact already occupied the position for some time, in the past. Having been found too authoritative by his former co-workers (he was previously a welder), he was dismissed by the board from his foremanship after a majority of workers opposed his holding the position, and he returned for a time to his welding job. He owes his recent comeback, one of the founding decisions of the new executive board, to his recognised technical skills and strength of character, but the negotiations required him to promise that he would adjust his leadership style to be more consensual. While Raymond has probably developed too much enmity on the shop floor to be able to leverage existing discontent against Bernard, other pockets of resistance still exist in the factory and may succeed in doing so in the future.

This symbolic murder of the chief is reminiscent of the actual murders that were sometimes perpetrated against primitive chiefs who tried to exceed their roles (Clastres, 1994: 91, 170; but also Leach, 2004[1964] in another part of the world). Clastres reports the tragic end of one of them:

They killed him in the middle of the square around which the village is built, the shelters. They killed him, all of them. I was told he was run through by perhaps 30 arrows! That is what they do with chiefs who want to play chiefs. In some cases, they turn their back on them, that is enough. If not, they wipe them out, once and for all.’  
(Clastres, 2012: 47, own translation)

Like the foreman, the executive board knows that its term – theoretically of four years – may come to an end more rapidly than planned if it dissatisfies Scopix members too much. This has not happened so far, all executive boards having been allowed to complete their term. Still, while Scopix’s co-operators are offered the opportunity to demonstrate their support for the board each year through a show of hands at the Annual General Meeting, they have not done so: the vote has been consistently negative in recent years. Although a negative vote is not expected to lead automatically to the resignation of the executive board, it contributes to reminding its members that they are permanently at the mercy of their co-workers.

In addition to potentially leading to some concrete changes in the organisation chart, the relentless overt critique and demands for accountability expressed by co-operators have a more immediate effect. They place chiefs under constant pressure, in a position reminiscent of

that of Clastrian chiefs, i.e. their owing an infinite debt to the group, a debt that is never supposed to be fulfilled. The constant flow of overt critique that members of Scopix direct at their chiefs is comparable with the constant looting by Indians of their chiefs' possessions. The endless requests for accountability that subject Scopix chiefs to futile justification is similar to Indians' requirements for primitive chiefs to talk, in both cases reversing the dominant belief that speech would be 'power's *right*' instead of 'power's *duty*' (Clastres, 1987: 153). And in both cases, form is actually more important than content: in primitive societies, chiefs' speech can at times be empty and fail to convey any meaningful content; at Scopix, criticism again does not always take issue with real facts. What matters most is simply that the flow of speech or critique be sustained, thus indefinitely reaffirming the infinite nature of chiefs' debt.

Within Scopix, this state of affairs may be tough to experience. While the current foreman is mentally resilient and has the advantage of knowing the tricks that he himself long performed as a shop-floor worker, his two immediate predecessors left the company, the first due to burn-out and the second to being systematically played and cheated by workers. Consequently, when chiefs meet other chiefs, their talks may sometimes be more evocative of group therapy than of an exchange between self-confident managers:

André, technical manager: I feel totally isolated within the company.

Olivier, member of the executive board: And what about us? Don't you think we feel isolated as an executive board?

One Tuesday evening, around 8pm, the executive board was continuing its weekly meeting through talking on the pavement in front of the factory, despite the darkness and bitter cold. Its members had had a particularly hard day, and I could sense a lot of weariness and despondency in their exchanges. To conclude, Olivier expressed in a striking manner a feeling that is widespread among Scopix chiefs:

One is used to speaking about harassment in relation to an employee. But shouldn't it be possible to speak about harassment in relation to an executive board too?

### ***Schoolboy humour***

The third important dimension that is revealed when studying co-operators in their constant effort to prevent chiefs from being chiefs is their use of humour. In order to convey the meaning attached to such practices, I will draw on two examples.

The first of these two stories was initiated when André, the technical manager, proposed that a small office be installed behind one of the press brakes, so that Gaël, the operator running it, did not have to keep going up to the second floor to access the software needed to modify a blueprint manually. The change necessitated installing a desk and two dividing walls, and moving the desktop computer from the second to the shop floor. Gaël was himself very supportive of the idea, but the executive board eventually chose not to follow it up, deciding that there were more urgent priorities on which to spend the several hundred euros, and maybe also fearing that the computer could be used by workers for purposes other than work.

To make a joke of the situation, Paul, one of Gaël's bending mates, decided to install a fake office in the intended place. He put a wooden plank on two stands, which he covered with a calendar, to look like a desk blotter. He then found a rejected steel part that was a similar shape to a computer screen, and brought in one of the plastic chairs used for the summer barbecues, with its blue cushion. Finally, to put the finishing touches to his work, he added a fan, a small name card with 'ANDRÉ' written in red, and a sheet of cardboard to form the front of the desk. On the wall behind the desk, he hung a large cardboard sign, saying 'TECHNICAL DESK – MR GAËL' (see Picture 1). The installation triggered a lot of amusement on the shop floor, the quality of the craftsmanship and the attention to detail being particularly praised. Gaël, despite being the butt of the joke, acknowledged that it was an excellent one. I did not witness André's reaction, but (from what I was told) the joke brought about a hollow laugh.



**Picture 1: Fake technical desk crafted by Paul**

The installation remained there for approximately two months, with none of the chiefs asking for it to be removed. When I realised one day that it had disappeared, I asked Gaël what had happened and he told me:

It was Paul and me who decided to remove it, like a couple of weeks ago. We just thought it did not really look great for customers.

Humour was used to mock not only the impeded fate of André's idea but also the executive board's refusal. During one lunchtime in the shared kitchen, in the presence of Olivier (a member of the executive board), the following conversation occurred. It had been a week of high absenteeism (through both holidays and sick leave), in the run-up to some departures:

Régis: If this goes on, we will end up having more office workers than shop-floor ones!

Gaël, very proud of his joke: That certainly won't happen. I recently asked for an office and it was refused by the board.

Olivier simply gave a forced laugh. This interaction shows how two dimensions of lay members' activities aimed at preventing chiefs from being chiefs tend to combine, humour often being intertwined with criticism (for related observations, see also Collinson, 1992; Korczynski, 2011; Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995). This appears to be a very powerful

weapon, the use of humour preventing chiefs from responding properly to the critique unless they themselves think up a better joke with which to gain the upper hand.

During my fifth month at Scopix, I was myself involved in the second story that illustrates best how co-operators use humour to ridicule managers at times. That morning, I was working on the stamping machine, one of the jobs that I personally considered the most tedious, since the machine (in addition to being the noisiest on the floor) makes the ground vibrate unpleasantly. Besides loading up the metal sheets and unloading the parts and the sheet skeleton, there is not much to do while the machine runs, but the presence of a worker is required in front of the machine to intervene in case of a problem. André, the technical manager, came to greet me and noticed something was wrong:

André: On these parts, you are supposed to remove the burrs in masked time as you go along. Didn't they tell you?

Me: Uh ... no, I didn't know ...

The two workers posted nearby, Loïc and Edmond, came over to us right then, perhaps because they were curious about what was going on. (For accuracy, I mention that they both happen to be members of the supervisory board, but am certain this had no influence on what happened.) The following conversation ensued:

André, addressing them: Didn't you tell him that he is supposed to work in masked time on these parts and start removing the burrs as he goes along?

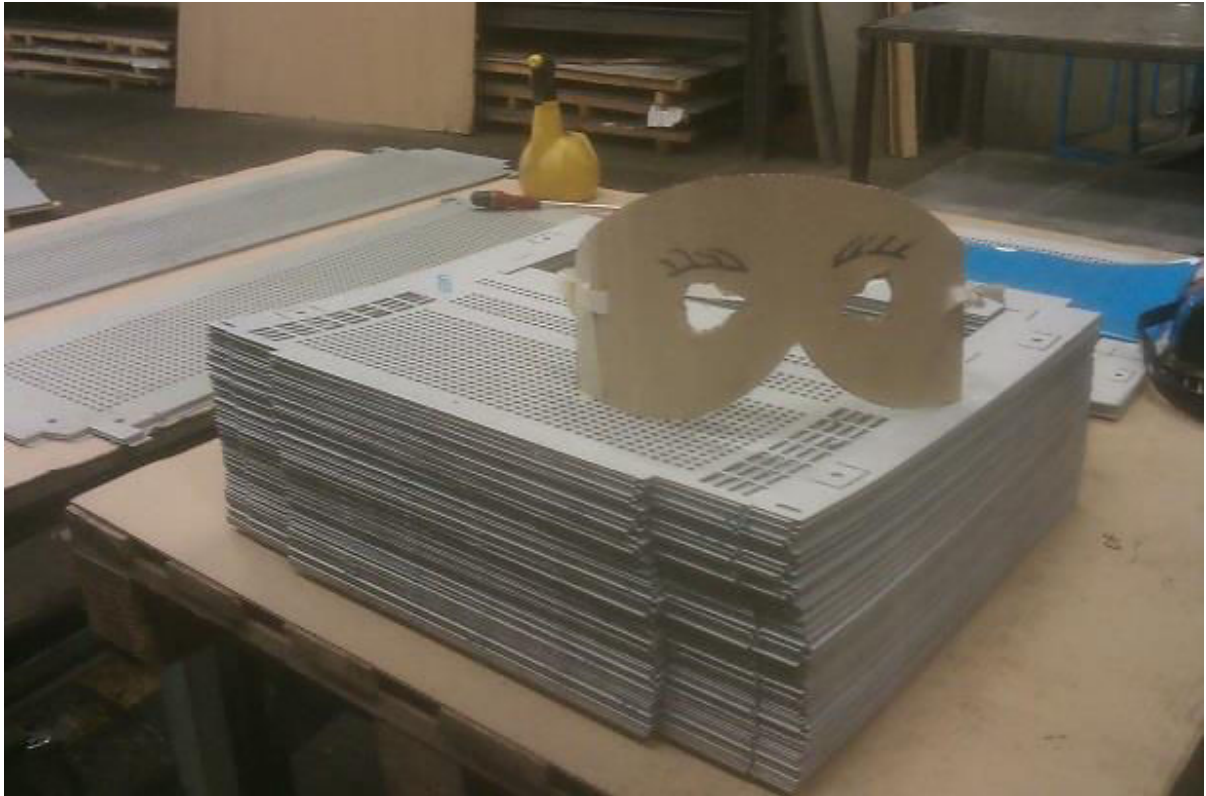
Loïc, with an incredulous smile: What?! Come on, André! It only takes a minute to remove all the burrs at the same time at the end. With a grinder, it will take no more than a minute; it makes no sense to do it as you go along. I don't think we're that tight for time at Scopix. If we were, we'd know by now!

During the exchange, Edmond, the second worker, had remained silent but expressed his agreement with Loïc through facial expression and gestures. A little vexed, André did not insist and left. The following morning, when I was again working on the stamping machine, Edmond came up to me, closely followed by Loïc, and offered me a mask he had cut from a sheet of cardboard (see Picture 2):

Edmond: Look, this way you will be able to work in masked time!

Loïc, appreciative of Edmond's sense of humour: Eh, have you seen our President?! [Edmond is sometimes called *Président* by some of his co-workers, because he is the

only remaining worker who was there at the inception of the co-operative, and he has also been a member of the supervisory board for a long time.]



**Picture 1: Mask crafted by Edmond, lying on top of a pile of parts**

I tried to put the mask on my face, but broke the lashing, which was a bit too small. While I was thinking that this would put an end to the game, Edmond in fact returned in the afternoon with the repaired mask, the length of the lashing being now right for my head. I wore it for 15 to 20 minutes (I had to remove it, because it was dangerously narrowing my focus when loading and unloading) and must admit I did not feel any reluctance in doing so; it seemed the natural thing to do in response to the invitation. In particular, the fact that Edmond had taken the trouble to repair it provided a clear indication that any attempt to escape the game would lead to some disappointment. My intuition was right, and the sight of the mask provoked some frank laughter from workers passing by during the time I wore it. It so happened that André was not among them, but it was nonetheless clear that he was also an (or even the main) intended witness of the scene.

An outsider's eye may easily downplay such ritualistic games, but the reactions that followed left little room for doubt that these are important markers of Scopix's culture. Several workers, including the foreman and a member of the executive board, said to me with a broad smile: 'Now, you're ready to become a permanent here.' While it lasted, joining in with the

joke made me a native. On the following days, another worker, Aziz, started to laugh every time we went past each other on the shop floor ('Ah, ah, the masked time! Very good!'), and called me either 'the masked time' or 'the masked avenger' on and off for several months. This does not mean that this cultural feature is not contested within Scopix, its childish characteristics being rejected by some. One worker with whom I had a good relationship told me:

My poor [author's first name]! I like you very much, you know. It's not too late yet; you don't need to become like them.

Although he used a tone that was only half serious, I could detect traces of genuine concern in what he said. But still, the fact that he felt the need to contest this cultural frame is yet another testimony to its importance. In the mask joke, it was not only the manager who was mocked but also the managerial discourse, which – through the pun on 'masked time' – was deconstructed. The real status of managerial words is suddenly revealed: that is, empty exhortations with no impact on the reality of the shop floor. Through schoolboy humour, co-operators thus succeed – in one fell swoop – in undermining the credibility both of chiefs and of their favourite means of exerting power.

### **Reframing traditional understandings of power and resistance**

The case of Scopix, as described through a Clastrian lens – that is, by looking at the efforts made by co-operators to avoid the coalescence of power in the hands of the co-operative's chiefs – raises several questions about the way organisation studies have generally conceived of power and resistance. Historically, resistance has been understood by scholars raised in the Marxist tradition of Labour Process Theory as the opposition by the working class to domination by those who either exert the global function of capital – that is the extraction, realisation and allocation of surplus value (Armstrong, 1985) – or ultimately benefit from it (Braverman, 1998[1974]; Edwards, 1979). Power and resistance – whether channelled by worker unions or directly undertaken by self-organised workers – thus appeared as contrasting attributes in the struggle between entrenched and clearly delimited interest groups.

Three interrelated trends have occurred that have led us to progressively reconsider this view. First, neo-Marxist studies of power and resistance were progressively forced to acknowledge that class struggle was more and more concealed, with the implementation of control systems such as piece-rating tending to align workers' objectives with the interests of the dominant class (Burawoy, 1979). As a consequence, the study of power and resistance became



increasingly interested in conflicts that were only marginally imprinted by ideology, and where workers and their representatives – rather than claiming the grand ambition of working-class emancipation – aimed, more modestly, at local arrangements that could improve working conditions (Burawoy, 1979; Delbridge, 1998; Edwards, 1979). Second, questions of identity and subjectivity gradually emerged as additional explanations for resistance, workers being seen as contextually engaged in the construction of selves or in the defence of collective identities that are not necessarily congruent with those that management tries to impose upon them (Collinson, 1992; Ezzamel et al., 2001; Jermier et al., 1994; Kondo, 1990; Thomas and Davies, 2005). Third, in the combined face of control systems that were deemed to be increasingly sophisticated and pervasive (Casey, 1999; Covalski et al., 1998; Kunda, 1992; Sewell, 1998; Townley, 1996; Willmott, 1993) and of a socio-economic context that has rendered the balance of power less and less favourable to workers (Du Gay and Morgan, 2013; Parker et al., 2014), it was argued that, rather than having disappeared, manifestations of resistance had progressively taken renewed forms (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Hodson, 1995; Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995). Such manifestations are often now more mundane than heroic (Certeau, 1984; Korczynski, 2007), and more covert than overt (Fleming and Spicer, 2002; Scott, 1990), and need therefore to be sought in the ‘subterranean realms of organisational life’ (Fleming and Sewell, 2002: 863). Cynicism, as a way for workers to distance themselves from dominant corporate discourses and injunctions, constitutes a paradigmatic example of such behaviours (Fleming, 2005; Fleming and Sewell, 2002; Karfakis and Kokkinidis, 2011), no matter how contested its effectiveness in genuinely influencing power relations in the workplace (Contu, 2008; Fleming and Spicer, 2003; Willmott, 1993).

There is little doubt that these three concurrent trends have significantly extended not only the possible meanings to be attributed to resistance but also the list of (mis)behaviours that are now to be included in its scope (Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Fleming and Spicer, 2007). With the present study, I aim to contribute further to the critical study of power and resistance, as developed through these three interrelated strands. To that purpose, the Clastrian perspective brings complementary theoretical insights of some importance. Within this perspective, equality is no longer seen as a moral ideal, forever sought after yet unattainable, but as something that can be posited and then culturally sustained. Members of the Clastrian tribe take social homogeneity for granted, and the interesting issue is thus found in the mechanisms by which they actualise this assumption. In taking equality seriously and not just

paying it lip service, they contribute to providing foundational elements for its actual achievement. As a consequence, the dominant focus of studying power and resistance is somehow shifted from the usual study of reactions to forms of domination to that of the quasi-performative effects of asserting equality in the first place (Rancière, 1991; see also Huault et al., 2014). This triggers a reversal of the dominant perspective, which is akin to the principle of ‘Copernican revolution’ called for by Clastres (Clastres, 1987: 25–26; Naishtat, 2011).

In view of leveraging these Clastrian insights, the Scopix case can be considered well-suited. Obviously, in casting co-operators who benefit equally from the extraction of surplus value, it neutralises the presence of objectively divergent interests between chiefs and lay workers – so definitively removing the lens of labour–capital antagonism – but this aspect is probably not the most significant. More importantly, because worker co-operatives rely on democratic principles (Webb and Cheney, 2014), the Scopix case features a context where assertions of equality are rendered more likely, spaces being open for the voicing of workers’ claims as well as for the expression of otherwise-repressed identities (Darr, 1999; Kokkinidis, 2014). This is actually not so much about the fact that equality is in some ways more objectively realised at Scopix than elsewhere; rather, it is about the fact that Scopix’s co-operators tend to take the principles of democracy and equality seriously. In acting as if democracy and equality are not just empty words, co-operators engage in the mechanisms by which they really do contribute to giving them real substance. Together, the Clastrian framework and its application to Scopix are then particularly conducive to casting light on often-overlooked aspects of power and resistance, and thus encourage the reconsideration of traditionally granted conceptions of these.

### ***Power, resistance: whose power and whose resistance?***

The first element from the Scopix case that challenges traditional conceptions of power and resistance relates to the question of who in reality exerts power, and who resists. For Clastres, the answer to these questions was straightforward when it came to South-American communities: the observation that Indian chiefs were powerless testified to the fact that power was found on the side of society (Clastres, 1987, 1994). If the Indian chiefs were not offered the opportunity to extract themselves from the social body, thus preventing groups from being divided between those who command and those who obey, this meant that power remained in the hands of the tribes. Resistance by chiefs was seldom noticed, and when it occurred, the most likely outcome was its rapid crackdown through the chief’s dismissal or murder

(Clastres, 2012: 47). In sum, confronted with the questions of who in fact exerted power and who resisted, Clastres (in the case of South-American Indian societies) offered an answer that is symmetrically opposed to the one that is usually taken for granted within organisation studies<sup>18</sup>. Power was an attribute of the tribe, and resistance was an attribute of the chief, but with the latter rendered very unlikely by the ultra-efficient mechanisms of control devised by Indians, which ultimately let the occurrence of an unexplained and disruptive event – what Clastres, drawing on La Boétie (2002[1574]), refers to as the *malencontre* (Cardoso, 2011; Clastres, 1994) – be the sole possibility for the reversal of power relationships.

The case of Scopix speaks in favour of an assignation of power and resistance duties that is more nuanced both than that traditionally envisioned within organisation studies and, at the same time (despite also featuring chiefs who are to a large extent powerless), than that envisioned by Clastres. Indeed, I described both instances in which the traditional vision of corporate settings seemed to apply, with chiefs' tentative displays of power being resisted by workers, and instances in which, conversely and in line with the Clastrian take, chiefs seemed to be the ones resisting co-operators' injunctions. We could apply to the former instances the contestations by workers of the selective implementation of the clocking-in system and of the unfairly awarded bonus. In those situations, workers can be seen as classically opposing some chiefs' decisions, as could be similarly observed, albeit often with less success, in most corporate settings. And we could apply to the latter instances the incessant requests for chiefs' accountability formulated by co-operators, to which chiefs try to respond by engaging in either justificatory work or truth reinstatement. In those situations, chiefs can in turn be seen as the ones resisting workers' displays of power, thus turning upside-down prevalent understandings of power and resistance.

There is no better illustration of the always-possible shift in power and resistance relationships at Scopix than the reference to harassment, such as that issued by Olivier: in the executive-board member's words, traditionally assigned roles of harassers and harassed suddenly merit being inverted, leaving the possibility open for power and resistance to be accounted for along reinvented lines. Similar shifts are made visible in the daily activities of the executive board, which may sometimes take sides with shop-floor workers against

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<sup>18</sup> To be sure, managers – particularly middle managers (Courpasson and Thoenig, 2010) – also resist within organisation studies, but their resistance is oriented towards their own managers. What has in fact remained constant in the literature is the almost-systematic assignation of fixed roles to workplace actors, power being invariably seen as an exclusive attribute of superordinate workers – and resistance, symmetrically, as an exclusive attribute of subordinate ones.

functional managers and may sometimes do just the opposite, rendering networks of power and resistance situational, and thus perpetually provisional. As a matter of fact, the singular position of the three members of the executive board is made all the more conducive to confusing traditional lines by their all happening to be the boss (qua members of the board) of their own boss (qua shop-floor workers), thus multiplying the opportunities for shifting roles and, in so doing, the loci of power and resistance. In sum, in view of the Scopix case, traditional conceptions of power and resistance, which envisage them as a priori and narrowly assigned to fixed groups, no longer hold. They now need to be dismissed in favour of a vision that considers the exercising of power and resistance as no more than temporarily assigned to individuals or collectives and as always likely to be redistributed along new lines of interpretation (Thomas and Hardy, 2011).

### ***Power, resistance: what first?***

The second element from the Scopix case that raises questions about traditional understandings of power and resistance relates to the usually admitted anteriority of power to resistance. In line with interpretations of a mechanistic sort, usually borrowed from physics, resistance is seen as naturally produced by power, as a mere counter-force that gets automatically released, albeit in varying degrees, in response to the application of some initial and triggering force. As a consequence, power and resistance become conceptually imprisoned within a ‘Newtonian’ (Thomas et al., 2011) ‘action–reaction type of relationship’ (Pina e Cunha et al., 2013).

The case of Scopix undermines this mechanistic view of power and resistance, for it displays many instances in which members of the co-operative engage in activities with aims that seem not to respond to chiefs’ endeavours, but rather to anticipate them – and, in so doing, more surely to avert them. The case of the Clastrian tribe is similarly replete with examples illustrating the same phenomenon. Particularly illustrative of such activities are the repeated assertions of equality, whether playfully or in a more serious tone, by Scopix members to chiefs; these have the effect of deterring the latter from excessively overt authoritarian claims and conduct. Roger’s comments, mentioned earlier, are of the same nature. His portrayal (to the new board) of previous executive-board members as privileged and selfish provides a compelling example of preventive activities that lead chiefs to much cautiousness, in particular to avoid engaging in actions that may arouse any suspicion of willingness to overstep their mandates or to favour self-serving decisions.

These examples tend to confirm that traditional views of power and resistance, which mechanistically consider resistance to be the natural reaction to power, miss part of the phenomenon that they purpose to account for. Indeed, if these various activities were to be interpreted in terms of resistance expressed by subordinates to their chiefs, they could be coined as representing ‘pre-emptive’ or ‘anticipatory’ resistance. However, doing this would conspicuously contradict the assumed understanding of resistance as being subsequent to power. In order to solve this paradox, one possibility would again be to relax the assumption of a fixed assignation of power and resistance roles (Thomas and Hardy, 2011) – as we did when reckoning that managers and their subordinates were in fact constantly shifting roles. Pre-emptive moves, such as those frequently made by Scopix members, could then be reinterpreted as expressions of power rather than resistance. But another possibility, which may – I suggest – be even more fruitful, would be to take one step further and also to relax the assumption of duality between power and resistance (Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994; Mumby, 2005), thus considering that resistance is not external to but instead operates from within power (Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994). In place of two separate and dichotomous concepts, there would remain only contextual networks of power relationships or struggles, within which power and resistance would be seen as co-constitutive and indiscernibly intertwined (Fleming and Spicer, 2007; Knights and Vurdubakis, 1994). Several recent studies of organisational change seem to have engaged in such directions by demonstrating the fragility of the usual distinctions drawn between active change agents and passive recipient agents, presenting change instead as the outcome of a co-construction between managers and subordinates, in which power and resistance are no longer readily discernible (Courpasson et al., 2012; Ford et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2011). In showing that change processes are not accurately reported when presented as imposed from above by powerful managers on resisting subordinates – rather, they reflect the engagement of both parties in subjective struggles around meaning – these studies have rightly made important steps in blurring the boundaries between the very concepts of power and resistance. However, the notions of thoughtful (Ford et al., 2008), facilitative (Thomas et al., 2011) and productive (Courpasson et al., 2012) resistance, which these studies promote, must equally be discarded, for they still contribute to reasserting the assignation of a priori and fixed roles when presenting resistance as the monopoly of subordinate workers against superordinate ones.

***Power, resistance: what is left?***

The last element from the Scopix case, which questions traditional understandings of power and resistance, directly stems from the two previously raised concerns; it relates to the essence of power. If power and resistance are not possessed once and for all by given individuals or collectives, but are instead contextually found in constantly shifting networks of power relations – and if, correlatively, resistance and power cannot be properly discerned, but instead are both indistinct parts of the same phenomenon – how is power eventually to be defined?

This is probably the aspect on which the Clastrian perspective is the most insightful. What Clastres has expressed so eloquently is that power is not embedded in certain titles, functions or positions, but is instead the outcome of the control mechanisms devised by the tribe. With polygamy, the Indian chief is conferred a privilege that is made all the more huge by the fact that South-American primitive societies sometimes comprise more men than women, meaning that polyandry is consequently the norm (Clastres, 1987: 116). Such an immense privilege creates an imbalance that can never be offset and constitutes, for this very reason, the founding principle of power relations within the tribe (Clastres, 1987). Indeed, it is because it is impossible to settle the debt owed to the tribe that the Indian chief can, in return, be submitted to infinite extortion of goods and words, and simultaneously be deprived of any form of power and authority. In the Scopix case, no similar privilege needs to be conferred upon executive-board members to give rise to similar mechanisms: the monthly bonus of 150 euros with which they are rewarded does not cover their extra hours, and what in fact makes them volunteer for these posts is the sheer naive belief, albeit rapidly abandoned once in office, that they may make a difference to the way the co-operative is run. Their hubris seems to be reason enough for their mates to submit them to the various containment mechanisms that I previously described, and thus largely to limit the extent of their prerogatives. Again, this shows that power is not embedded in hierarchies, but is best described as emerging from configurations of practices – or, to put it another way, that power should always be considered the *explanandum* rather than the *explanans*. Being a chief may well be tantamount to being powerful, but only if chieftainship rests on underlying mechanisms that allow it to be so; this is definitely not the case either in the Indian tribe or in Scopix, where the prevalent mechanisms are – conversely – those that prevent chiefs from being chiefs.

Because he conceived power as the intended outcome of subtle mechanisms of (unbalanced) exchange, Clastres can be said to have been one of the first to have correctly defined power as a technology (Foucault, 2007). In emphasising the impossibility of equating power with

something that would, a priori, be possessed by certain people or be embedded in certain positions, the understanding of power as a technology invites organisational scholars to dig into the detailed organisational processes and practices by which power relationships are in fact constituted, a direction that is also echoed in theorisations of power as ‘power to’ rather than ‘power over’ (Chan, 2000; Kärreman and Alvesson, 2009). While such an emphasis on technologies of power is hardly new within organisation studies, it tends to have been narrowly restricted to studies of control and surveillance – through, for instance, the description and analysis of processes related to the implementation of systems such as Human Resource Management (Weiskopf and Munro, 2012), Total Quality Management (Delbridge, 1995) and management accounting (Alvehus and Spicer, 2012). In focusing on such highly formalised systems of control, whose initiative can thus be that of management only, it has neglected the possibility of a whole range of technologies that would draw on much less (or even no) technical equipment, and be little-formalised (see Sutherland et al., 2014). The Scopix case, through featuring the effects of implicit debt-based mechanisms on power relationships, provides an instantiation of technologies of this kind, and thus invites organisation studies to attend to them more systematically.

In sum, the Scopix case, through featuring co-operators in their continual effort to ‘prevent chiefs from being chiefs’, endorses the view that power relationships are the contingent outcome of contextual configurations of practices. In these, power and resistance are no longer readily discernible (rather than resistance being considered a detached reaction to power), and the related role assignments are constantly shifting (rather than power being the fixed attribute of managers, and resistance that of subordinate workers.) Additionally, it suggests that such configurations of practices may well rely on little-equipped and little-formalised mechanisms – rather than sophisticated technologies, which are usually the privilege of management only. These various theoretical insights stem directly from the application of a Clastrian perspective, in which the positing a priori of equality leads to envisioning organisational members’ resistance practices as first-move activities rather than as mere responses to ingrained forms of power. This ultimately leads to the blurring of the distinction between power and resistance, and to leaving the field sufficiently open for unexpected creative mechanisms to be able to mould power relationships.

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# **TROISIEME ARTICLE**



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**No one is a manager, no one should ever become one: Craft ethics as an alternative to management in a co-operative sheet-metal factory**

**Abstract:** One of the main obstacles that prevent alternative organisations to remain truly alternative over time is said to be found in both cultural and market pressures found in their capitalist environment. This is with this daunting perspective in mind that the concept of ‘degeneration’ has been theorised for analysing the convergence towards capitalistic-like endeavours too often observed within co-operative organisations. In the present paper, I aim to contribute to the recently revived stream of research that is interested in how these pressures can be resisted in practise by specifically looking at how the fate of managerialisation can be eschewed. To that purpose, I draw on an ethnographic study of a co-operative sheet-metal factory in which I did one year of participant observation as a shop-floor worker. Within this context, I show in particular how co-operators have developed some craft ethics as an alternative means of control for supplementing their refusal of the grip of managerialisation. Based on these findings, I first provide a framework which facilitates the understanding of resistance to managerialisation, and suggest that multifarious forms of resistance, that is forms of resistance combining practises of distinct kinds, may be the most successful at keeping managerialisation at bay. I then discuss the extent to which professional values can serve as a valid alternative to the managerial perspective within alternative organisations. Finally, I propose the concept of ‘organisation against management’ in order to label those organisations in which the absence – or limited presence – of the managerial agenda should actually be interpreted as the expression not of a lack but rather of a rejection.

**Keywords:** Alternative forms of organisation; worker co-operatives; degeneration; management; managerialisation; craft ethics; sheet-metal work; ethnography



## Introduction

Periods of economic difficulties usually witness some renewed interest in alternative forms of organisations (Birchall, 2011). The current economic crisis is no exception to this rule, with the need for alternatives being called for as possible antidotes to the most obvious excesses of capitalism, such as financialisation, crude short-termism, and loss of moral foundations, resulting in – among other dire consequences – high unemployment, harsher working conditions, increased inequalities and exhaustion of natural resources (Adler, 2014; Cheney et al., 2014; Parker et al., 2014). But, at the same time, one of the main obstacles that prevent alternative organisations to remain genuinely alternative over time is precisely said to be found in both cultural and market pressures found in their capitalist environment (Cheney et al., 2014; Cornforth et al., 1988; Rothschild-Whitt, 1976). This is with this daunting perspective in mind that the concept of ‘degeneration’ has been theorised for analysing the convergence towards capitalistic-like endeavours too often observed within co-operative organisations (Mandel, 1975; Webb and Webb, 1914). Degeneration is not limited in its scope to the mere resurgence of a for-profit orientation but may more largely involve the alignment of all kinds of organisational features with dominant capitalist patterns, including for example changes in governance as well as in the way core activities are run (Storey et al., 2014).

The will to understand how these capitalist pressures can be resisted in practise has recently materialised in a re-emergent stream of research (Cheney et al., 2014; Kokkinidis, 2014; Parker et al., 2014; Storey et al., 2014). Additionally, this stream of research has found some further theoretical justification within the community of Critical Management Studies through its emerging orientation towards critical performativity, that is the endeavour to study pragmatic solutions that can actively challenge mainstream organisational practises (Spicer et al., 2009). In this frame, alternative forms of organisations and heterotopies, co-operatives in particular, are certainly intended to occupy a choice position, first as puzzles to be grasped and then as models to be reproduced (Leca et al., 2014). In the present paper, I aim to contribute to this stream of research interested in the understanding of how alternative organisations may resist pressures from a dominantly-capitalist environment. In particular, I am interested in the way that managerialisation – that is the growing pre-eminence of management skills, processes and tools – may be challenged within alternative organisations, thus resisting the overwhelming trend that has already been increasingly affecting various public services (Diefenbach, 2009) and non-profit organisations (Hoque and Parker, 2014).



To that purpose, I draw on an ethnographic study of a co-operative factory in which I did one year of participant observation as a shop-floor worker. Scopix<sup>1</sup> has been dealing with sheet-metal work for more than 30 years, delivering small- and medium-size production runs of various metal parts to its exclusively local customers. It now comprises 25 worker-associates and relies on self-management principles, its governance bodies being constituted by a supervisory board and an executive board that are composed mostly of factory workers. Within this context, I analyse in particular how co-operators have kept management skills, processes and tools largely at bay, and have developed a form of craft ethics (that is, basically, following what one's craft mandates) as an alternative means of control of their work activities. Based on these findings, I first provide a framework which facilitates the understanding of resistance to managerialisation, and suggest that multifarious forms of resistance, that is forms of resistance combining practises of distinct kinds, may be the most successful at overcoming managerialisation. I then discuss the extent to which professional values can serve as a valid alternative to the managerial perspective within alternative organisations. Finally, I propose the concept of 'organisation against management' in order to label those organisations in which the absence – or limited presence – of the managerial agenda should actually be interpreted as the expression not of a lack but rather of a rejection.

In the remainder of the paper, I first discuss the implications of degeneration theses for alternative organisations, insisting in particular on its managerial aspects (section 2). I later introduce the empirical setting and describe the ethnographic method (section 3). I then detail my results, explaining on what bases managerialisation is resisted within Scopix and how some craft ethics are implemented as an alternative to management skills, processes and tools (section 4). Finally, I show how this contributes to the debate on degeneration theses within management research (section 5).

### **Positioning: studying resistance to managerialisation as a form of degeneration**

In this section, I first explain how the cultural and market pressures affecting the functioning of co-operatives have been theorised in the literature, in particular through the concept of degeneration. I then elaborate on the notion of managerialisation, here understood as one particular facet of degeneration, and develop the multiple dimensions it may assume.

#### ***Degeneration theses***

One of the main obstacles that prevent alternative organisations to remain genuinely alternative over time is said to be found in both cultural and market pressures found in their capitalist environment (Cheney et al., 2014; Cornforth et al., 1988; Rothschild-Whitt, 1976). From a cultural perspective, it is argued that organisations that confront a dominantly capitalist mind-set in the field in which they operate tend to progressively succumb to this very mind-set (Rothschild-Whitt, 1976). From a market perspective, it is argued that alternative organisations can hardly compete on the long run with organisations whose efficacy is deemed superior in meeting expectations from competitive markets (Mandel, 1975; Webb and Webb, 1914). This is with such a focus on the exogenous factors that would constrain alternative organisations to resemble other organisations within their field of activity, that the concept of ‘degeneration’ has been theorised by scholars for analysing the convergence towards capitalistic-like endeavours too often observed within co-operative organisations (Cornforth, 1995; Storey et al., 2014).

Two main reasons can be advanced for explaining the fact that, among other possible forms of alternative organisations, co-operatives have come to occupy a central position in the theorisation of the concept of degeneration. First, unlike some other forms of alternative organisations, co-operatives have a long tradition dating back from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and thus provide ample longitudinal empirical material for pondering degeneration phenomena (Birchall, 2011; Fairbairn, 1994). The involvement of several co-operative banks in murky speculating activities in the frame of the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the unbridled transformation of agricultural co-operatives into gigantic vertically-integrated multinationals as a response to globalisation are but the most recent illustrations of the sensitivity of co-operatives to the pervasive effects of capitalist pressures (Abhervé, 2015). Second, co-operatives may, among alternative organisations, represent an extreme case in so far as it is part of their genes to seek for the cultivation of an alternative identity while at the same time engaging in direct competition with traditional investor-owned companies (Birchall, 2011). Indeed, unlike other alternative organisations whose activities dominantly concentrate on sectors that are either abandoned by or of secondary importance for the market economy, co-operatives more than often devote themselves to economic activities in which they confront corporate organisations (Webb and Cheney, 2014). The tensions inherent in this ambiguous positioning need therefore being acknowledged and accommodated, or risk otherwise to give way to processes of degeneration (Ashforth and Reingen, 2014; Westenholz, 1993).

Broadly speaking, two dominant approaches of degeneration dominate the stage, highlighting different but complementary facets of the phenomenon (Cornforth et al., 1988): the first speaks of ‘goal degeneration’ to underline the shift to a profit-seeking orientation from various other possible drives, for instance politically- or socially-motivated ones; the second speaks of ‘organisational degeneration’ to insist on the mutations that affect the status of organisational members and organisational processes, including for example changes in governance as well as in the way core activities are run. Degeneration is indeed not limited in its scope to the mere resurgence of a for-profit orientation but may more largely involve the alignment of all kinds of work processes and organisational routines with dominant capitalist patterns. Among various possible examples, this may include the professionalization of administrative functions (Bataille-Chedotel and Huntzinger, 2004), a progressive reduction in member participation leading to the attrition of the democratic spirit (Bakaikoa et al., 2004) or acquisition-based strategies of internationalisation (Errasti et al., 2003).

In the next sub-section, I elaborate on the concept of managerialisation, which I envisage here, in the context of alternative organisations such as co-operatives, as a specific form of organisational degeneration.

### ***Managerialisation as a form of organisational degeneration***

Managerialisation encompasses two aspects, which are first the development of novel managerial practises and second the extension of the reach of existing managerial practises to new domains of activity (Grey, 1996; Parker, 2002). Regarding the former aspect, several waves of managerialisation can be identified throughout history, with distinct types of managerial practises being promoted within each of them. There is indeed little in common between the prescriptions brought by the first historical wave of managerialisation, which for instance relied on principles of scientific management to accompany industrialisation (Braverman, 1998[1974]; Edwards, 1979), and those found in the contemporary forms of empowerment that now seem to dominate the managerial agenda (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; Fleming, 2014; Kunda, 1992). However, these sharp differences should not conceal the fact that new management approaches, rather than merely displacing older ones, usually combine with them, as is for instance illustrated by the persistence within organisations of bureaucratic features despite the rise of cultural models of management (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2004; Hodgson, 2004). A first challenge attached to the study of managerialisation thus lies in the identification of the various forms taken by management and the

understanding of how such new managerial manifestations contextually interact with older ones.

The second facet of managerialisation concerns the extension of the reach of existing managerial practises to an increasing number of domains of activity. The focus is this time brought on the fact that the grip of management is not limited to corporations only but increasingly permeates organisations and domains that had so far been shielded from its influence, with the danger that all aspects of our lives ultimately become a matter of management (Clegg, 2014; Grey, 1999; Parker, 2002). Public services provide a case in point for the analysis of such trends, with the well-documented penetration of New Public Management in countries like the UK, Australia and New Zealand (Diefenbach, 2009). Non-profit organisations have been similarly identified as another example of organisations that are increasingly permeated by all sorts of managerial discourses and devices (Hoque and Parker, 2014; Sanders and McClellan, 2014). One of the main challenges attached to the study of this facet of managerialisation consists in assessing the extent to which the nature of the activities performed gets affected by the fact that they are now managed. For instance, the adoption of managerial practises within public hospitals has led to profound changes in the patient-physician relationship (Waring, 2007). In the case of alternative organisations and in particular co-operatives, several arguments can be advanced to make the point that a systematic recourse to managers and management techniques ultimately makes those organisations less alternative and less co-operative, e.g. contributes to their degeneration. I will now expose some of these arguments.

A first argument which goes in the direction of considering managerialisation as a form of degeneration relates to acknowledging its encroachment upon organisational democracy. In handing over the reins of their organisation to professional managers, co-operators contribute to open a gap between a managing elite and largely uninformed members (Cathcart, 2013). The favouring of representative democracy over direct democracy, such as entailed in the reliance upon a group of professional managers, tends to limit worker participation sometimes to the point where it is neither expected nor desired anymore (Clarke, 1984). Many observers of co-operative life seem content enough when they are able to report that democratic rights are formally respected, with all members having an equal vote and being entitled to raise their voice during the General Assembly. But if these rights remain mostly theoretical and do not translate into some active, informed and sustained involvement in both policy formulation and execution, co-operation remains a moot concept (Clarke, 1984; Kasmir, 1996). And, to those

who would object that managers merely take on responsibilities which members do not wish to shoulder, Clarke (1984: 108) aptly responds that ‘it is no excuse to suggest that workers are relatively satisfied with their lack of participation, since this represents simply a rationalization of the internalization of workers’ sense of powerlessness’.

Another argument which invites scholars to consider the managerialisation of alternative organisations as a form of degeneration relates to the negative effects engendered by the infusion of organisational discourses with management rhetorics (Parker, 2002). In their study of an American non-profit organisation, Sanders and McClellan (2014) evidence at least two such effects that may similarly apply to co-operatives. First, in reformulating non-economic objectives in the same business terms as economic ones, the managerialisation of organisational discourses conceals the actual contradictions between economic and non-economic values which precisely stand at the heart of co-operation. Tensions get evacuated rather than negotiated, conflicts of meaning suppressed rather than acknowledged, all features that paradox perspectives on co-operation have already shown to be recipes for degeneration (Ashforth and Reingen, 2014; Cornforth, 2004; Hernandez, 2006; Westenholtz, 1993, 1999). To paraphrase Sanders and McClellan (2014: 85), co-operative practitioners should thus ‘avoid describing their complicated activities in the limited terms of business, and instead employ terms that embrace the complex tension between remaining financially stable in a market economy while fulfilling a social mission.’ Second, a too systematic framing of co-operative activities in managerial terms favours and progressively imposes a particular understanding of what it is to be a co-operative organisation (Sanders and McClellan, 2014). This comes to limit the cognitive horizon of co-operators and closes the door to the possibilities of richer and sounder conceptions of how co-operation ought to be practised (Ferraro et al., 2005; Sanders and McClellan, 2014).

A last argument which contributes to justify the assimilation of managerialisation to a form of degeneration lies in the analyses by critical scholars of the negative effects that management methods and tools have been exerting on working conditions. This is obviously true when it is referred to the rigours brought by scientific management: the generic concept of deskilling sums up very well the destruction of traditional craft skills and loss of any meaningful work content stemming from the separation of conception and execution tasks and the further fragmentation of execution tasks into multiple operations assigned to distinct workers (Braverman, 1998[1974]). But this is alas true as well, albeit for different reasons, of the management methods that appeared since to supposedly remedy these problems and provide

workers with more autonomy. Critical scholars have indeed similarly alerted on the downside effects of management methods aimed at workers' empowerment, quality circles and their likes being altogether denounced as sophisticated modes of labour control which still treat workers as means rather than ends and prolong the trend of labour intensification (Grey, 1996; Kasmir, 1996). Drawing lessons from these critical assessments implies for co-operators to at least consider management technologies with a certain degree of circumspection if co-operatives are to provide not only an alternative form of ownership (i.e. employee ownership) but also an alternative work experience (Clarke, 1984; Grey, 1996; Kasmir, 1996).

To sum up these insights, it may be said that the management take is not a neutral one and that it has, through its various dimensions (managers but also management discourses, methods and tools), a profound impact on the way workers' selves are constructed and social relationships experienced in the workplace and even beyond (Grey, 1999; Parker, 2002). In the case of co-operatives, these elements clearly invite to characterise managerialisation as a form of degeneration. Before bringing the discussion of this point to a close, there is still one frequently-heard argument which probably needs to be refuted. Indeed, the idea has been expressed that management may be a blessing in disguise for alternative organisations, and in particular that the emergence in their midst of a managerial elite may constitute the best chance for some of them to meet their goals (Osterman, 2006; Voss and Sherman, 2000). This idea that organisational degeneration may be the surest path to avoid goal degeneration has some appeal but there are at least two reasons for dismissing it. First, it can be stated that organisational degeneration still is degeneration. Second, it is also possible to argue that the distinction between organisational and goal degenerations is heuristically useful but becomes a bit moot in the case of co-operatives, in which discerning means and ends is sometimes hazardous. This difficulty is for instance rendered visible when looking at the co-operative values and principles such as they were progressively developed by the co-operative movement (Birchall, 2005; Fairbairn, 1994; ICA, 1995). Indeed, it seems that co-operation is supposed to be found as much in the daily operations of the co-operative as in its outcomes, which is also the idea conveyed by Sennett (2013[2012]) when he speaks of co-operation as something akin to a craft.

In the present paper, I wish to illuminate how managerialisation, here understood as a form of degeneration, can be resisted in practise within co-operatives. In doing so, I aim more generally to contribute to the research stream that is interested in the study of how the fate of degeneration can be eschewed by alternative organisations. The will to understand how

capitalist pressures can be resisted by such organisations has indeed recently materialised in a re-emergent stream of research (Cheney et al., 2014; Parker et al., 2014; Storey et al., 2014). In this frame, several aspects relating to managerialisation have already been studied but the risk exists that an excessive focus is once again put on governance aspects, i.e. the problematics of managers and of their professionalization as well as of the degree of control exerted over them through member participation, at the expense of the other dimensions of managerialisation which I previously described, i.e. the increasing pervasiveness of managerial discourses, methods and tools. This dominant focus on governance has already been the cornerstone of previous waves of research interested in degeneration (e.g. Bataille-Chedotel and Huntzinger, 2004; Batstone, 1983; Spear et al., 2004) and it would be inadequate, to say the least, if it were to constitute for on-going research again the privileged standpoint from which to study degeneration (e.g. Flecha and Ngai, 2014; Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014; Paraque and Willmott, 2014; Storey et al., 2014). In order to cover facets of managerialisation to which the degeneration literature is too often blind, I here propose to reintegrate work itself in the picture (Barley and Kunda, 2001; Gomez, 2013). This is with this purpose in mind that I now turn to my data and method.

### **Data & methods: an ethnography of a co-operative sheet-metal factory**

In this section, I present the chosen empirical setting and then provide insights on my methodological approach.

#### ***Empirical setting***

Scopix is a sheet-metal factory that is located in France and was incorporated as a worker co-operative (also known as a SCOP for ‘Société Coopérative et Participative’) some 30 years ago. At that time, the owner and boss of the company that then existed decided to close down the factory. The workers picketed it for several weeks until they were eventually offered the opportunity to run the business as a co-operative. After a couple of difficult years, during which employees frequently worked for no pay at the weekend in order to avoid bankruptcy, Scopix found itself in a position to support the rapid development of one of its customers, thus securing the activity and profitability of the co-operative. Scopix now comprises 25 worker-associates and has a yearly turnover of circa €2.5m, with this customer still being its main one and accounting for nearly half its sales. Typical products include electrical boxes or

cabinets, control panels and various mechanical parts, with sheets of aluminium, steel and stainless steel being processed, based on customers' technical blueprints.

Customers interested in large-size production runs of sheet-metal products already rely to that purpose on subcontractors located in European countries that have cheaper labour. Consequently, Scopix's market positioning is on the delivery of small- and medium-size production runs to exclusively local customers (that is approximately within a 80 km-radius). Reactivity, flexibility, short delivery times and proximity support actually constitute what is sought after by its customers. On this market segment, Scopix mostly competes with three other local sheet-metal factories, whose size is slightly superior to that of the co-operative. Scopix's subcontractors (painting operations are subcontracted), competitors and customers are all investor-owned companies, meaning that it is fully immersed in a capitalist environment. Looking at past financial results, the turnover has remained fairly stable over the last ten years but an erosion of the profit was however observed over the period (even leading to a loss in the 2012-2013 accounting period), which is explained by the fact that Scopix's customers have become tougher at price negotiations as a reaction to the economic crisis. This trend includes Scopix's main customer, which now tends to more systematically challenge Scopix's quotes as a result of passing on the downward pressures on prices and margins of its own customers.

The shop floor is divided into three main sections (in order of process flow): cutting (stamping and laser cutting), bending, and welding plus assembly. Sheet-metal work is a physically demanding job, with most tasks requiring workers to stand up all day, and frequently to handle heavy and cumbersome parts. Consequently, many workers, even the youngest, suffer from chronic back problems. In addition, the shop floor is very noisy, and some of the tasks are either dirty (due to the metal dust from grinding and deburring) or dangerous (for example, bending, where one worker cut off the tip of one finger in my presence), not to mention repetitive. Masculinity (Collinson, 1992; Willis, 1981[1977]) is another dominant feature of Scopix, with the shop-floor workers being exclusively men. This tends to be reinforced by the ancestry of workers (Willis, 1981[1977]), most of whom originate from Southern European and North African countries (Italy, Portugal, Spain, Algeria, Tunisia etc.), where this cultural trait is even more prevalent than in France.

All current workers are associates, except for a few trainees and temporary workers, the rule in force being that workers usually become associates after they have completed their first year of employment. The company is 100% owned by its employees, with no support from



external associates ever having been needed. Scopix functions with a supervisory board (composed of three members elected by the associates for a six-year term) and an executive board (three voluntary members designated by the supervisory board for a four-year term). All three members of the supervisory board are currently shop-floor workers. While the previous executive board was composed of two functional managers (accounting and sales) and one shop-floor worker, the new board (designated in 2013) is now predominantly composed of shop-floor workers, with just one of its members splitting his time between office activities (programming for cutting machines) and shop-floor work (cutting). This feature – i.e. the existence of an executive board that is composed of members whose term is quite short and tends not to be renewed, and that includes lay workers – is in itself a strong marker of Scopix's distinctiveness among French worker co-operatives. Organisations of a similar size are in most cases directed by a general manager who happens to be a professional manager and whose term of office often extends over a long timeframe (Bataille-Chedotel and Huntzinger, 2004). This testifies for Scopix's pronounced interest in egalitarianism, an interest that is also reflected in the limited wage-differential scale (approximately 1:2) and in the fact that profit-sharing bonuses are not defined in proportion to salaries but are distributed equally.

## ***Methods***

My engagement with the factory was as an unpaid trainee over a one-year period, from September 2013 to September 2014, filling in for various vacancies on jobs that are less demanding in terms of skills. I started with the job that is considered the most basic on the shop floor, that is grinding and deburring, and then progressively took on others, such as tapping, milling, and plugging of metal inserts and studs. I was also able to work on the stamping and bending equipment, provided the machine had already been set up by a skilled worker. In fact, bending on a press brake soon became one of my most frequent assignments, since I apparently displayed less clumsiness in this, as well as genuine affinity for the task. My specific status also allowed me to attend as many meetings as I wished. In particular, I systematically attended the weekly meeting of the executive committee (*réunion de directoire*), which takes place every Tuesday after the end of the working day; during this, committee members review the main issues, make decisions, and see co-operators who wish to make complaints. I also attended all the individual interviews organised by the new executive committee at the beginning of its term so as to get feedback from the associates about their priorities. Other opportunities to engage further with my co-workers came in the

form of lunch breaks (usually in the shared kitchen or at barbecues organised in front of the factory during spring and summer), and going out with single men of all ages at the weekend.

If conditions of access to the field are revealing of the group under study (Favret-Saada, 1977; Geertz, 1973), I must confess that my access to Scopix was surprisingly easy. It was granted, despite my presenting a rather vague objective at the time, after a single interview with one member of the former executive board, whose decision was immediately validated by her co-members on the board. And while I was afraid that the new executive board – which was designated after I had gained this agreement but before I had actually started my fieldwork – might question a decision made by their predecessors, they reiterated their agreement after a brief meeting. During my stay, I was never refused the opportunity to participate in any meeting, even including those on sensitive matters (for instance, giving a warning to an associate), and most of the time was even kindly informed when an unexpected meeting was organised on the spot. When I expressed surprise about my presence being so easily accepted, for instance in the previously mentioned individual interviews, which included personal information (all workers agreeing to my attending, and all except one to having the interview recorded), the recurring motto was: ‘We’ve nothing to hide here.’

My data consist mostly of fieldnotes, which I spent between two and three hours after each working day to gather in an electronic diary. These fieldnotes were themselves based on headnotes, i.e. my mental recollection of events and talks of the day, as well as on some notes jotted on a small notebook wherever possible, some jobs like the stamping one allowing some free time while the machine runs (Emerson et al., 1995). During the regular meetings or those planned sufficiently in advance, I used to bring my laptop and directly type my notes in the diary.

In order to keep some spontaneity to my account, I decided not to perform any systematic coding of the material I had collected. Rather, I chose to draw on the methods of ethnographic writing advocated by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) in order to produce a ‘thematic narrative’ that is fieldnote-centered and where the story is analytically thematised, but in rather loose ways (Emerson et al., 1995: 170). In that spirit, I used as my starting point the observations that I considered the most revealing and edited the corresponding fieldnote excerpts. I then started to provide some interpretations for their meanings and progressively connected them to related observations, thus generating in the end a sequence of ‘thematically organised units of excerpts and analytic commentary’ (Emerson et al., 1995: 170).

My aim was first and foremost to produce a convincing account, i.e. one that meets the objectives of authenticity, plausibility and criticality (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993). I tried to achieve authenticity, that is ‘convey[ing] the vitality of everyday life encountered by the researcher in the field setting’ (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993: 599), by exposing in the paper my status during the fieldwork and clearly delimiting in the findings my involvement in the narrated events. I dealt with the criterion of plausibility, that is connecting with organisational scholars’ common concerns (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993: 600), by relating my empirics to the scholarly discussion on degeneration and managerialisation. Finally, I endeavoured to reach criticality, that is ‘the ability of the text to actively probe readers to reconsider their taken-for-granted ideas and beliefs’ (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993: 600), by proposing the concept of ‘organisation against management’ in order to label those organisations in which the absence – or limited presence – of the managerial agenda should actually be interpreted as the expression not of a lack but rather of a rejection.

In the next section, I now turn to my results.

### **Results: craft ethics as an alternative to management**

In this section, I show how co-operators have kept management skills, discourses, processes and tools largely at bay, and have developed a form of craft ethics as an alternative means of control of work activities. In the first sub-section, I try to convey the vision of craft as it is prevalent within Scopix. In the second sub-section, I then analyse how management functions are problematized within Scopix and, in the third sub-section, how they are substituted by a form of peer-control based on craft ethics. In the fourth sub-section, I finally show how this reliance on craft translates into the distancing of managerial processes and tools, opening the possibility of a different work experience.

#### ***Craft orientation***

The craft orientation of Scopix is visible in the fact that the organisation promotes the professional skills related to sheet-metal work and claims a dominantly craft-oriented conception of such skills. ‘Doing one’s job’ (originally ‘faire son boulot’) is a very simple slogan through which this philosophy of work backed on craft is often expressed. ‘Having the eye of the sheet-metal worker’ (originally ‘avoir l’œil du tôlier’) is another of these idiomatic constructions in which this orientation towards crafts is crystallized. ‘Having the eye of the sheet-metal worker’ is of course being able to evaluate visually the thickness of a sheet, the

straightness of an edge or the accuracy of a right angle; but it is also, especially in the case of the welder (because it is not enough to weld straight to get a straight weld), learning to anticipate the reactions of the sheet and its deformations, which themselves are function of the welding process, sheet metal and filler metal in use as well as many other parameters. The material has a life of its own, and only patiently reveals its secrets to those who take the trouble to become the custodian thereof (Sennett, 2008). Ultimately, 'craft ethics' is probably the turn of phrase that best encapsulates the prevailing craft orientation of Scopix. Craft ethics is about knowing what one's 'craft mandates in particular situations and follow[ing] that mandate' (Giampetro-Meyer et al., 1998: 1731). Craft ethics also implies that what one's craft mandates will ultimately take precedence over other types of prescriptions in case of conflict (Giampetro-Meyer et al., 1998: 1731).

Craft has a structuring effect within Scopix, with the level of craftsmanship attained being the main determinant of co-operators' statuses and identities within the organisation. There is in fact a form of segregation at Scopix between 'the guys who are in the trade' (originally 'les gars qui sont du métier'), that is to say those who were trained in sheet-metal work, particularly in welding, before joining Scopix, and 'guys who are not in the trade' ('les gars qui sont pas du métier'), that is to say those who joined Scopix without sheet-metal work being for them a vocation. To the formers who start working as P1 welders and are intended to pass P2 and P3 as they progressively develop their craft, one can oppose the latter who first work for two to three years at deburring and then move to tasks that are barely better valued such as milling, drilling and plugging of metal studs, or, at best, for some of them, to the cutting and bending sections, that is activities that are better considered for a start and also offer the opportunity to become P3. Marc, in his mid-thirties with six years of seniority, is a good example of those 'guys who are not in the trade.' He first spent two years at deburring before becoming the 'king of the mill' (a largely pejorative appellation). He tries to learn welding during his lunch breaks: 'I feel immediately more like a welder!', he told me one day that I met him wearing his welding helmet. His face displayed a certain pride, but his remark at the same time underlined the abyss still separating him from genuine sheet-metal workers.

This structuring of the workforce based on its degree of craftsmanship plays a powerful role in terms of coordination of shop-floor activities. As I will later explain, the distribution of the workload depends mostly on the degree of craftsmanship exhibited by workers, the realisation of the most difficult parts being assigned to the most skilled workers while the less difficult ones to the less skilled ones. Besides these powerful coordinating effects of craft, other

features of Scopix tend to limit the need for the kind of coordination that is usually said to be fulfilled by management. For instance, Scopix seems to purposely limit its size by expressing reluctance to any significant increase in its headcount. As Michel, the elder member of the executive board, said me once, ‘it’s already complex enough with 25 guys, I dread to imagine what it’d be like with 50!’. Accordingly, commercial activities are calibrated so as to just ensure the loading of the current workforce and extending the perimeter of sales prospection is not envisaged unless sales hit lasting lows. In any case, co-operators have so far rendered any significant increase in headcount and thus activity nearly impossible by postponing their due relocation to a bigger building (Scopix’s premises are currently located in a housing estate, and the city council has expressed for already some time the wish to have the co-operative move to an industrial one). If one considers the limited size as well as the messiness of Scopix’s current shop-floor, it may actually be more accurate to speak of a workshop rather than of a shop-floor.

To sum up, several aspects illustrate the inclination of the co-operative towards a culture of craft rather than towards industrial and managerial rationalities. By making sure that the organisation is maintained ‘within the confines of small-scale craft production’ (Clarke, 1984: 109), co-operators seem to have found a first way to resist managerialisation. In particular, the craft orientation of Scopix tends to limit from the outset the needs for further coordination. Out of the two functions that are generally recognised to management, that is coordination and control, my focus in the next sections will therefore be mostly on control and I will again strive to demonstrate how the reliance on craft-related features is consistently preferred to the recourse to management-related ones so as to ensure this function. To that purpose, I will start with analysing how management functions are problematized within Scopix.

### ***Managers and managerial discourses***

Raymond: ‘Have you seen this flake, we’ll sort out his case [...] Again one of those guys who think they know everything and who will come and tell us what to do. I see them coming from afar those kinds of guys!’

Edmond, wearily, calming Raymond’s irritation: ‘Yep, but why do you have to become hot under the collar since anyway we won’t do what he’ll ask?! ...’

A man has just gone through the workshop in the company of two executive-board members, well-enough dressed to cause this exchange between the two workers. Raymond does not know yet exactly who he is (he is in fact an independent consultant recommended by the

URSCOP, the Regional Union of Worker Co-operatives), but a few seconds were enough for Raymond to identify him as a representative of management in all its quintessence. The disdain expressed by Raymond and his mates actually goes beyond that commonly found in the literature. For example, in the manufacturing plant described by Collinson (1992), managerial functions are certainly denigrated (because they lack everything that makes the masculine culture of the shop-floor) but their usefulness is not fundamentally questioned. It is quite different at Scopix: to the denigration is added up the widely-shared conviction that these are, to use Graeber's (2013) terms, 'bullshit jobs', that is jobs that are largely useless (see also Spicer, 2013).

Preventing the emergence of managers at Scopix (see article 2 for further insights on the mechanisms by which it is actually realised in practise) follows then at least two objectives: in doing so, co-operators do not only preserve the democratic functioning of their organization (i.e. avoiding to have decisions taken by a small bunch of self-serving players), they also shield it from the bullshit (i.e. avoiding to have bad decisions taken). In the here-described opposition of Scopix's members to managers, management functions are demystified twice: firstly because the relevance of their specialised knowledge is challenged ('one of those guys who think they know everything'); and secondly because their claim of encroachment upon the reality of the shop-floor is swiftly dismissed ('anyway we won't do what he'll ask'). To the motto proposed (and actually denounced) by Grey (1999), 'we are all managers now, we always were', the one which co-operators substitute could be stated as: 'no one is a manager, no one should ever become one'.

The debates around the absence of a professional general manager within Scopix are particularly illustrative of the external pressures towards managerialisation to which co-operators are subjected and of the ways by which such pressures are resisted. The co-operative movement itself, rather than shielding Scopix from pressures towards capitalist conformity, seems in many instances to act as a conduit for their transmission. As an illustration, I could once hear the consultant of the URSCOP who is specifically in charge of supporting Scopix (together with about forty other co-operatives from the same geographic area) address the members of the executive board in the following terms:

'There is no alternative [to having a professional general manager]! If all other SCOP have a general manager, it's not by accident. It's because it's a proven model and it works.'

Members of Scopix are well aware that their reliance on an executive board composed mostly of factory workers puts them apart from other co-operatives. It is a characteristic which they systematically refer to when evoking how specific their position in the co-operative landscape is. Members of Scopix would have plenty of arguments to oppose the URSCOP consultant's claim: their co-operative has been successfully operating for more than 30 years without a professional manager except for a few short-lived experiences (up to three according to the oldest co-operators, with the latest one dating back from 2009), and many organisations that were led by one have gone out of business during that period of time. However, the violence of these external pressures is such that it leads to periodically reignite discussions within Scopix about the opportunity to conform.

During my presence in the field, debates about the absence of a general manager arose this time from the feeling of exhaustion already encountered by executive-board members after having been in office for merely one year (out of four, normally). As explained in article 2, membership in the executive board is a hard task since, in addition to being unprepared for it (they have only limited insight on administrative tasks) and having nearly no time made available for it (they merely dedicate a few hours per week to attend meetings; we here clearly see again the will to demystify management by not allowing it proper conditions of exercise), those in office are prevented by various means from carrying out their mandate. For these reasons, resignation from the executive board is a common practise at Scopix: until 2005, only one third of executive-board members have completed their term; resignations have been rarer since but the situation of the current board testifies for the fact that membership in the board has not become a barrel of laughs though. This is in this context that the move undertaken by the board so as to reignite discussions around the possibility of having a professional manager should be primarily understood: board members perceived the resurgence of this topic as a possibility for them to escape in a foreseeable future a burden they were no longer willing to bear, and at the same time as a means to momentarily alleviate their unease with the pressing demands from the URSCOP.

The consultation of the co-operators that ensued from the board move led to the rejection of the proposal, which is, given the prevalence within the co-operative of views that assimilate managing to bullshitting, an unsurprising outcome. However, studying the justifications advanced by Scopix's members on this occasion allows to distinguishing additional arguments (with all types of arguments being often indistinctly advanced by the same co-operators) against the recruitment of a professional manager. A first argument advanced by

co-operators was that Scopix cannot afford paying a professional manager. Through this argument in the form of a cost-benefit analysis, it is in fact recognised that a professional manager may bring some added value to the co-operative but that there is however little chance that such added value would be enough to compensate for his or her salary. A second argument advanced by co-operators was that past similar attempts at integrating a professional manager (up to three as I mentioned above) had all been failures, rapidly ending up in the resignation of the manager. In co-operators' minds, this demonstrates that managers do not support for very long being systematically challenged by non-managers and prevented from implementing self-serving decisions.

Here again, it is important to notice that the challenging by the co-operators of the specialised knowledge embodied by managers is closely related to the opposite appreciation of the specialised knowledge embodied by craftsmanship. A compelling illustration of this lies in the appointment of the current foreman. Having been recruited externally, the previous job-holder showed limited knowledge of sheet-metal work and intended to contribute to the workshop mostly through his managerial skills. This did not work for very long and Bernard, his current replacement is none other than the best sheet-metal worker in the workshop. Like all leaders at Scopix, he does not succeed in imposing any kind of managerial authority (see again article 2), but no one at least questions his unrivalled mastery of products and processes.

In the next sub-section, I will show how the rejection of managers by members of Scopix gets compensated by a form of peer-control based on craft ethics. This rejection does indeed not mean that no form of control is exerted on the shop-floor. Rather, managerial control is substituted by a form of lateral control, which manifests itself in both the promotion of a job well done and the denigration of shoddy work.

### ***Craft ethics as a form of peer-control***

As I previously noticed, craft ethics is about understanding what one's craft mandates and abiding by that mandate (Giampetro-Meyer et al., 1998: 1731). But craft ethics is not limited to the relation one has to his own craft, it is also collectively experienced. As such, it may also lead to the formulation of quasi-moral judgements on what one's peers do. Within Scopix, the promotion of well-done work and of the craft skills that well-done work demonstrates sometimes leads to sober peer tributes. Speaking of Gaël, the ablest of bending workers, René, the storekeeper, reckons that 'yes, he knows how to work' ('oui, il sait bosser'); Régis, a welder, goes in the same direction, this time in the presence of the concerned person, 'he's a



bit of a bear the Tourangeau [Gaël is from Tours] but if everyone could work like him, things would go better.’ Co-operators are stingy with compliments and those they concede, generally by paying lip service and through understatements, thus mean a lot. This is even under an involuntary form that Léo, who has great difficulty in mastering the dimensions of the cabinet he is working on and must therefore resort to the hammer beyond what is reasonable, pays tribute to Régis as the two welders are busy working on the same model of cabinet from their two neighbouring workspaces: ‘how come he never whacks? I’d like to know how he does, he really has to explain to me!!!’ When I work sufficiently close to Léo’s workspace, when milling for instance, I am the one whom Léo picks up to hold the block of wood that he interposes between the hammer and the cabinet so as not to mark the metal. I could not help but close my eyes the first time the hammer fell on the wooden shim; it is a massive one and a clumsy gesture on Léo’s part would be enough to crush my hand. Meanwhile, the hammer blows resound throughout the shop-floor and thus report very audibly to all other co-operators Léo’s deficient craftsmanship.

This illustration thus leads me from the promotion of professional skills directly to its counterpart, namely the stigmatisation of incompetence and default of craft, which is ultimately what the forms of peer-control which come to replace at Scopix the usual forms of managerial control draw on.

If they are stingy with compliments vis-à-vis good sheet-metal workers, co-operators are not, however, short of mockeries and even insults vis-à-vis clumsy workers. More than in the appreciation of craft prowess, it is in the denigration of shoddy work that Scopix cultural inclination towards skill and craft becomes manifest. I heard one day a group of workers mock Edmond, agreeing on the fact that he does not know how to bind, and must then straighten up all his parts with the mallet, but that it turns out to a catastrophic result because ‘he’s not a sheet-metal worker.’ One of them went further: ‘I told Bernard [the foreman] he should be forbidden to use the mallet’; then went on, accompanying his description of gestures whose comic effect was quite successful, ‘he whacks, after what the angle is good in the end but the part is all twisted.’ Another concluded: ‘what we ask from a bending worker is to bend right, not to bend and try straightening up afterwards.’

The exchange took place in the absence of Edmond but it would not necessarily have been very different in his presence, which is where it actually becomes a very efficient form of peer-control. In this way, Aziz openly teased him on another occasion and in very similar terms. The time it happened, we were several workers gathered around the quality control

workspace and Olivier, the quality technician, was criticizing Edmond for not having whacked in the right place. Aziz launched him a first dig, ‘ah, the mallet, Ed’s preferred tool!’ Then, pointing his finger at one of the pictures of the workshop displayed on Olivier’s computer screen, he launched a second: ‘look, this is Ed’s machine, I recognise the wrongly bended parts in front!’ Edmond remained silent but I could clearly notice, by observing him, that he was hit by the blow. I could notice that even Jérémy, another favourite target of such attacks, was not immunised against them although he pretended that he did not ‘give a flying f\*\*\*.’

As a form of peer-control, the stigmatisation of deviant behaviour is not limited to blows to the self-esteem of those who constitute its targets, it also affects more concrete behaviours. A common practise among co-operators consists in concealing their scrapped parts in order not to expose themselves too easily to criticism. I for instance observed such behaviour exemplified by Paul on a day when he was helping me doing the set-up of my press brake and, visibly more and more nervous, was messing up with his corrections of angles. While I was expecting him to rework his initial test parts to avoid throwing them, he preferred instead to swiftly evacuate them towards the dumpster and I immediately understood that it was the way for him to shield himself from likely gibes. After only a few months of fieldwork, I would find myself doing the same, preserving me as well against the attacks from my workmates.

An account of my own trajectory within the shop-floor is illustrative of how craft ethics, and in particular their negative side, infuse co-operators’ identities, elicit their sense of proudness or, conversely, of inadequacy. The first stage which I went through during my fieldwork was one of worry, that of not being able to do anything useful on the shop-floor and thus be invited to leave it (see for instance Linhart, 1981[1978] for a similar experience). My very first activity, deburring during my first week, had gone well enough although I was rather slow and had difficulties in identifying the quality finish expected for each type of product and customer. But performing this belittled activity was like part of the usual induction process at Scopix and, moreover, the incumbent worker did certainly not need being assisted. I thus rapidly moved to other functions such as milling, drilling and plugging studs, in which I more directly was to experience my deficiencies: my studs were too often plugged sideways, my millings uneven in depth, my weld studs not holding firmly.

Beyond my being afraid that I could lose my privileged access to the shop-floor (already at that stage, it was pretty clear to me that participation into the shop-floor activities was the best

vantage point from which to analyse the functioning of Scopix), I could not satisfy myself with such mediocre performance, which was eroding my self-esteem and, more importantly, was hardly prone to deserve the minimal esteem which I wanted to elicit from my co-workers. As noticed by Sennett (2008: 97), ‘the craftsman’s workshop is ... a cruel school if it activates our sense of inadequacy.’ This is the reason why I came to cling to bending activities as to a lifebuoy. I started being assigned from time to time to the bending section as early as the second week of my presence on the shop-floor and immediately felt some genuine affinity for this task. For sure, my autonomy was rather limited since a skilled worker had to realise the set-up beforehand (this is only later that I started to learn how to myself select the appropriate tooling and make the set-up for simple-enough parts). And the activity was all the more repetitive that I was as much as possible supplied with the largest batches so as to avoid too frequent resets of the machine. However, in my face-to-face with the press brake, I had at least the feeling of being sufficiently in control of the main outcomes of the bending process, namely angles and distances, which I had rapidly learnt how to fine-tune, and of being reasonably productive, the gap in my working pace as compared to that of experienced workers being much more limited than with any other task.

A tipping point in my trajectory as an aspiring bending worker was Eric’s accident, which happened during my eighth week of presence. A temporary worker, Eric cut off the tip of one finger while working on a press brake. During the unwinding of this event, I had heard several men complaining about the use of non-qualified workers for such dangerous tasks. It was difficult to consider these statements as not applying to my own situation and I was afraid that the accident would put an end to my bending apprenticeship. It may seem hard to explain why I was willing so much to continue being assigned to a task that had once again proved its dangerousness and why I actually felt so much relief when, the following day, the foreman asked me to finish Eric’s work. What was then to explain my unwavering commitment to returning to the bending section, if not my fear to be set aside from the only activity in which I had so far demonstrated at least some minimal proficiency and thus be further exposed to the craft-based forms of denigration fuelled by my workmates. I had first interpreted my whole evolution as a bending worker – from the markedly offensive comments welcoming my debut (‘so you want to pretend you’re a bending worker!?’) to the much more likeable ones accompanying my last days in the field (‘drop your thesis and I’ll make you a real bending worker’) – as a sort of personal achievement but actually, with hindsight, I could at least as

aptly interpret this trajectory as the effect of my subjection to co-operators' effective craft-based forms of control.

After having shown how management functions are substituted at Scopix by a form of peer-control based on craft ethics, I will finally show in the next section how this reliance on craft also translates into the distancing of managerial processes and tools, ultimately opening the possibility of a different work experience.

### ***Managerial processes and tools***

If the opposition to management displayed by members of Scopix were limited to an opposition in principle to managers and managerial skills, it would maybe succeed in neutralising oligarchic tendencies within the co-operative but would in all likelihood let the nature of work and the work experience of co-operators ultimately unaffected. It is thus important to notice that their opposition to management is in fact broader than that in the sense that, beyond managers and managerial discourses, it similarly encompasses managerial processes and tools. I will dedicate the present sub-section to further developing these aspects of co-operators' resistance to managerialisation. The methods and tools that are fought against at Scopix are mostly those embodied in models of scientific management so as to improve productivity and quality standards, and only marginally those embodied in more recent management methods based on empowerment and cultural control, which have barely attained the co-operative so far.

The resistance to an excessive division of labour is the first line of defence along which the co-operators' anti-managerial stance is asserted when it comes to their work organisation. In this, the reference to craft again constitutes an important resource for co-operators to thwart the pressures towards further rationalisation. To be sure, today's workshop is no longer quite the same as that from twenty-five or thirty years ago. According to Roger, one of the oldest co-operators:

‘It was a real job at the time. The sheet-metal worker did everything from A to Z. He was in contact with the client, he had to imagine the developed blank, make his bends and then his welding and assembly operations. Each sheet-metal worker had the knowledge of some particular products, which he would be the only one to realise.’

Scopix has not fully escaped the general trend of Taylora-Fordist rationalisation, which results in an increased division of labour and a sharper separation between conception and

execution tasks (Braverman, 1998[1974]; Edwards, 1979). The co-operative now works based on the blueprints designed by its customers' engineering departments. The cutting and bending sections, with their now more complex machines, have become more specialized. As acknowledged by Léo, also one of the oldest workers:

‘The problem is that we are driven to work like this, we need to produce anyway, there are competitors and all that, so the environment encourages us to work in a certain way in order to keep up with the game.’

This being said, Scopix displays a visible resistance to this movement of division of labour and its associated consequences, as the examples that will follow illustrate, confirming in so doing the possibility of some genuine leeway in the forms of work developed by alternative organisations (Clarke, 1984; Sabel, 1982).

The welding and assembly section is particularly illustrative of how co-operators have largely eschewed a greater division of labour. Within this section, it is the overall complexity of the part that determines its realisation by a more or less skilled sheet-metal worker (from P1 for the least qualified to P3 for the most qualified) and the worker is then responsible for all operations required by its realisation, the simplest like the most complicated (rather than the simplest operations being ‘subcontracted’ to less-skilled colleagues, as would imply rationalisation principles). This distinctive feature became especially salient during discussions that took place one day on the shop-floor about a product on which Scopix could not align its prices with those of its competitors. Everyone participating in the discussion then agreed with the analysis of the youngest executive-board member, Kevin, himself a talented sheet-metal worker, for whom this is the division of welding and surface-treatment operations (polishing then being assigned to an unskilled worker), which allows the competitor to display a comparative advantage. But, significantly, at no time the possibility of proceeding in the same way in order to bridge the gap in the cost of production was mentioned. This would have indeed contravened the implicit rule according to which a sheet-metal worker deals with a part in its entirety.

There are thus red lines within Scopix which should not be crossed, whatever the competitive pressure felt from outside. The links between such red lines and Scopix's craft orientation can be easily established. The refusal of further division of labour has first for objective to maintain the integrity of and thus the meaning attached to the overall task performed. Additionally, it also allows co-operators to remain accountable for the quality of their work towards the customer: for instance, it is systematically the one who has committed a mistake

who is invited to visit the customer in order to repair it. This principle gave me the opportunity to successively accompany Léo and Jérémy to the premises of Scopix's main customer, the first for having omitted two welding points on a cabinet, the second to straighten some misaligned hinges.

Although there is probably less room left for manoeuvre within the cutting and bending sections, where the use of standard machines tends to more heavily determine work processes, I was nonetheless able to observe there practises that similarly aimed at mitigating the negative effects stemming from rationalisation. Edmond, one of the already mentioned bending workers, provides a compelling example of such practises aimed at regaining degrees of freedom over the content of one's job through its flexible use of the library of bending programs. Bending workers are normally supposed to create a bending program only when they process prototypes and new parts. In all other cases, they can normally retrieve the already existing program from the hard drive of their press-brake or from a set of available diskettes. I could observe that Edmond would frequently choose to rewrite a new program rather than resort to the library. In so doing, he introduces additional interludes of reflection in a job that is otherwise dominated by physical tasks, thus partially breaking the monotony which he comes to experience after having been working at Scopix for more than 30 years. What he actually does through this practise is to improve the balance within his job between tasks of conception (programming) and execution (bending), overtly going against one of the main principles stemming from scientific management (Braverman, 1998[1974]).

Work intensification is at Scopix another resisted feature among those consequences that usually stem from rationalisation processes. A significant illustration is provided by Paul, another bending worker, who decided one day that some parts were too heavy and cumbersome for him to bend on his own, although they had until now always been bended by a single worker. Paul asked one of his colleagues (in this case a temporary worker) to help him processing the batch and paid no attention to the comments of the technical manager, who complained that the price had been calculated on the basis of a single worker, meaning that this business would no longer be profitable if all bending workers were to do the same. The mockeries of his colleagues, which they grounded in the masculine culture of the shop-floor, had no effect neither on Paul this time, although they are usually more successful than arguments of an economic sort in influencing co-operators' behaviour. Beyond this exemplary case, frequent coffee breaks and chats with colleagues, together with the autonomous setting

of one's speed of work, constitute, at Scopix, commonly practised means for alleviating the strain entailed by the exercise of physically demanding jobs.

It must also be noticed that freedom works both ways at Scopix since zeal is equally tolerated by co-operators. Many shop-floor ethnographies evidence the anger that is triggered among workers by overzealous colleagues (Linhart, 1981[1978]) and this is often one of the first things learnt in the field by the apprentice ethnographer that there are collectively agreed-upon standards of output not to be exceeded (Lupton, 2003[1963]). There are usually good reasons for justifying those forms of peer-control because repeatedly outperforming management expectations, although it may in the short run result in individual financial rewards, leads to a subsequent raise in production targets, meaning that current rewards can in the end only be maintained through an overall intensification of work (Burawoy, 1979). None of this takes place at Scopix, where a colleague's sustained effort is seen as being in everybody's interest and will therefore not trigger calls for moderation (or, if it does, those calls will this time not take the form of threats but rather express sheer concern for one's colleague's excessive activity).

In sum, many signs testify for the fact that workers at Scopix exert much more freedom, in terms of possibilities of not only intervening on the content of their work but also regulating their pace of work, than that which is usually encountered in traditional settings. Co-operators are well aware of benefitting from additional liberties when comparing their situation to that found within other companies and they establish a clear link between their enjoying such degrees of freedom and the fact that Scopix is a co-operative. A clear instance of this perception is found in the fact that smoking is allowed on the factory floor, an advantage that nearly half of the workers make use of. While I was expressing my surprise during my very first day in the field, the worker with whom I was working replied without any hesitation (pointing at the same his finger at the ashtray for the case I would need it): 'it's 'cos it's a co-op'.

Finally, the pervasiveness of management tools is similarly resisted within Scopix. The workers show little consideration for the only real administrative constraint imposed upon them: the orange sheets on which they should normally record the quantities produced and past times often remain blank. And when, to solve a quality problem related to the production of new cabinets, Olivier, the quality technician, proposed the implementation of a control sheet on which the worker would register the actual measurements of the key dimensions, Bernard, the foreman, immediately dismissed this possibility: 'A P3 [worker of the highest

rank, to whom the production of these cabinets is assigned due to their complexity] must know how to control his work, with or without a control sheet; this is the ABC!’ A similar refrain gets played during the weekly executive-board meeting: where business-school students and organizational consultants would probably propose all sorts of management tools in order to solve Scopix’s problems, Michel, the executive-board’s elder, advocates a much simpler policy: ‘let’s just have the guys doing their job, f\*\*\*!’ (‘qu’les gars fassent leur boulot merde!’). Through this motto, another red line of Scopix is formulated, which again directly connects to the notion of craft: management tools should not be allowed to control for activities whose outcomes are already warranted by workers’ craft. The distrust expressed by co-operators towards management tools actually reflects their idea that the use of such tools (e.g. control sheets) would mean the substitution of solid skills by formal but easy-to-distort routines; or, to say it differently, that it would not increase workers’ accountability but instead diminish it by emptying the notion of craft from its very substance.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Drawing on these results, I propose two contributions to the understanding of how managerialisation can be resisted by co-operatives and, more largely, of how external pressures from a capitalist environment can be eschewed by alternative organisations. First, by connecting my findings to the dominant perspectives aimed at explaining managerialisation, I provide a framework which facilitates the understanding of resistance to managerialisation. Based on the analysis of the case of Scopix in the light of this framework, I also suggest that multifarious forms of resistance may be more successful at resisting managerialisation than selective ones. Second, I propose that professional values can be reasserted with some success so as to oppose the claims for a growing encroachment upon work activities entailed by managerial perspectives. To conclude, I introduce the concept of organisation against management and explain its broader implications for management research.

## ***Resisting managerialisation***

A possible way to make sense of the various practises of resistance to managerialisation observed at Scopix is to connect them with the three dominant ways in which the rise of management has been theorised in the literature. Three prominent perspectives – respectively technical, elite and political – can in fact be distinguished that strive to provide explanations



for the rise of management within the corporate realm and beyond (Grey, 1999; Reed, 1989). The technical stance is of a functional sort, with management being said to provide compelling responses to the increasing need for expertise brought about by increasingly complex organisations, themselves involved in increasingly complex environments (e.g. Chandler, 1977). This view, which is founded on the premises that things are manageable and that it is desirable that things be managed, is widely shared by managers, management consultants and management scholars (Grey, 1996). The two other stances are of a critical sort and therefore put their emphasis on the control side of management at the expense of that of coordination. The elite stance envisages managers as forming an elite that withdraws the benefit stemming from the fact that management activities are socially highly-valued and therefore strives to perpetuate the legitimacy of those activities (e.g. Jackall, 2010[1988]). Managerialisation is therefore about the preservation and even extension of the interest of managers as a social group. Within this perspective, it is actually difficult to define what management exactly consists in since it is observed that non-managers more than often perform, in and outside the workplace, tasks that are hardly distinguishable from those performed by managers (Alvesson and Willmott, 1996). Ultimately, management is thus nothing else than what managers do (Grey, 1999). Finally, the political stance understands management activities as a way to exert control over the labour force so as to maximise the extraction of surplus value (e.g. Edwards, 1979). Within this perspective, a strong focus is put on the concrete organisation of productive activities as it is entailed by the implementation of various management methods and tools. There are in fact as many standpoints from which resistance to managerialisation can be looked at as there are explanatory frameworks for managerialisation. Depending on which perspective is favoured – either technical, or elite, or political – avoiding degeneration will command different approaches.

If the technical perspective is favoured, management will be accepted as the best possible response to bring to the complexification of the organisation and of its environment. In their debate about the pros and cons of having a general manager, the co-operators who draw on a cost-benefit analysis in order to dismiss this possibility actually adopt a technical stance: they acknowledge that the presence of a general manager may be beneficial, but claim at the same time that the level of complexity reached by the activities of the co-operative is not high enough for justifying it. If one adopts the technical perspective, the way to resist managerialisation and thus degeneration will therefore consist in limiting complexity and consequently the needs for coordination and control attached to it. This may imply, as is the

case with Scopix, limiting the size of the co-operative, that is refusing to grow the organisation beyond a certain level of activity or number of workers-associates. This reasoning ultimately explains why the size parameter has traditionally been granted some central importance as a condition for the successful operation of alternative organisations (Cornforth, 1995; Hunt, 1992; Rothschild-Whitt, 1976). But limiting complexity may also imply refraining from introducing technologies and types of knowledge that would lead to the ultra-specialisation of some of the workers and again lead to some predetermined forms of expert coordination (Clarke, 1984; Rothschild-Whitt, 1976). Here again, in order to avoid this, Scopix chooses to limit its scope to craft-like activities which involve complex but standardised skills, similar to those involved in highly professionalised environments (Mintzberg, 1993[1983]). In sum, resisting managerialisation from a technical perspective on managerialisation may well be tantamount to maintaining the organisation ‘within the confines of small-scale craft production’ (Clarke, 1984: 109), which corresponds indeed to an obvious endeavour of Scopix.

If the elite perspective on managerialisation is the favoured one, the problem may be not so much about management itself than about the fact that some co-operators may seize the benefits accruing from the legitimization of a management expertise at the expense of the rest of the collective. Therefore, in order to resist managerialisation, the main focus of attention is this time likely to be on managers rather than on management techniques and tools. A first solution consists in adopting a range of mechanisms that avoid the concentration of administrative tasks in the same hands and in doing so prevents the appropriation of administrative skills by a handful of co-operators. Possibilities include, as listed by Cornforth (1995: 504), ‘job rotation, dividing up and sharing administrative tasks, and “doubling up”’. In this vein, some co-operatives are seen to refuse management functions the same degree of differentiation which they at the same time concede other technical positions (Hunt, 1992). Scopix clearly features practises pertaining to this approach when it comes to its executive committee: this includes frequent job rotations (the terms are usually not renewed, and often not even completed) and even ‘tripling up’ (the committee includes three members). A second solution consists in accepting the professionalization of administrative functions while at the same time refusing that these functions be granted a special status within the co-operative, thus contributing to the demystification of management as a specialised knowledge (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). At Scopix, this is the position adopted towards administrative support functions, whose holders are proposed below-market salaries, which results in

attracting only candidates who display either a strong co-operative value-orientation (for instance, the accountant) or a limited ambition (for instance, the salesman). In sum, where the elite perspective on managerialisation is favoured, the idea that is ultimately conveyed is that management should, if not necessarily be rejected outright, at least be neutralised (Hunt, 1992).

Finally, favouring the political stance on managerialisation will lead to consider resistance to managerialisation as having its focus on making sure that a non-capitalist form of ownership does actually translate into non-capitalist modes of production. The argument here is basically the one developed by Grey (1996) in reference to Simone Weil and which can be summarised in the distinction made between the concepts of exploitation and oppression. Following Grey's line of argument, employee ownership puts an end to exploitation, that is the appropriation of the surplus created by workers by a class of people who have not created this surplus, but does not necessarily puts an end to oppression, that is the persistence of work situations in which workers are treated as means rather than ends. Considering that these situations of oppression are precisely the consequence of the stranglehold of management on work organisation, genuine co-operation will be about inventing forms of work that significantly distance themselves from those promoted by management methods and tools (Clarke, 1984; Kasmir, 1996; Kokkinidis, 2014). Here again, Scopix features many practises that respond to this third stance on managerialisation. In particular, this includes the whole set of practises which I have described in the last part of the results section, showing how co-operators put usual management processes and tools at a distance so as to retain their work autonomy as well as their accountability for the tasks performed.

Relating the various practises aimed at resisting managerialisation that I could observe at Scopix to the three dominant perspectives aimed at explaining managerialisation thus allows conceiving of a threefold framework which facilitates the categorisation of such resistance practises. The distinction between, respectively, counter-technical, counter-elite and counter-political practises of resistance ultimately facilitates the understanding of those practises by establishing a direct link between a given practise and the source of its motivation. For instance, a counter-technical practise of resistance tends to target the very conditions that are likely to favour the emergence of administrative functions. A counter-elite practise of resistance tends to target the holders of those administrative functions that have emerged from such favourable conditions, i.e. those we often call managers. Finally, a counter-political practise of resistance targets the deployment of the various processes, methods and tools that

are usually promoted by those holders of management functions. Additionally, analysing the case of Scopix in the light of this framework suggests that multifarious forms of resistance – i.e. forms of resistance combining at the same time counter-technical, -elite and -political practises – may be more successful at resisting managerialisation than selective ones – i.e. forms of resistance displaying a single type of practises. Indeed, as I already noticed, the co-operative engages in forms of resistance to managerialisation that pertain indistinctly to all three dominant perspectives thereon. This is not only true of Scopix as a whole, this is similarly true of individual co-operators who commonly, sometimes within the same argument or practical sequence, mix elements pertaining to more than one perspective.

### ***Anchoring resistance to degeneration into professional values***

The response that is brought by Scopix to the risk of managerialisation and thus degeneration to which it is confronted lies (particularly in the case of counter-technical and -political practises of resistance) mostly in the reassertion of values anchored in craft and craftsmanship. This finding points to the possibility for professional values to act as a powerful antidote to managerial values within all organisations that operate in sectors in which strong professional identities are already at disposal (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Mintzberg, 1993[1983]). In the case of Scopix, sheet-metal work provides such a ready-to-rely-upon identity from which elements of resistance to managerialisation can be devised. What the case of Scopix does not however indicate is the extent to which it is possible to revert to a professional logic from a managerial one once the transition to the latter has been set in motion. Indeed, the literature is rich in examples showing the overcoming of professional values by managerialisation (Covaleski et al., 2003; Huising, 2014; Thornton and Ocasio, 1999) but provides little empirical evidence of the reverse phenomenon. Some researchers interested in co-operation have for sure disclosed patterns of regeneration in which managerial advances got at least partly reverted (Cornforth, 1995; Storey et al., 2014) but have so far not identified professional values as a possible engine of such reversion.

The case of Scopix can also, more generally, be considered a good reminder that scholars interested in the study of how alternative organisations may resist external pressures towards capitalist conformity should not only seek for novel solutions. In doing so, they would indeed overlook the possibility for alternative organisations to overcome degeneration by having recourse, more simply, to ancient and already proven models of organisation, such as those found in pre-managerial times. While this attention to old forms of organisation may be

criticised for its reactionary flavour, it is nonetheless a necessary one as the study of Scopix clearly indicates. In this case, the alternative that is put forth by co-operators is indeed hardly new; on the contrary, it consists in the promotion of the model of industrial craft that was prevalent at the end of the 19th century and largely succumbed to the wave of Taylorisation during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Braverman, 1998[1974]; Sabel, 1982). Interestingly, this also connects to the origins of French worker co-operatives, whose appearance in the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was instrumental in rebuilding professional communities of companion craftsmen (Demoustier, 1984; Espagne, 2000).

At the same time, the case of Scopix shows that an unqualified praise of ancient professional logics would be inappropriate. The craft-based model that prevails at the co-operative has certainly the merit of offering more autonomy to workers and an enviable status to the most crafted among them, but it also presents drawbacks. In particular, the forms of peer-control embodied in the stigmatisation of the lack of craftsmanship allow the introduction of some perverse harshness towards the less talented workers. They carry to the extreme the logic of honour which d'Iribarne (2003) has defined as the main cultural element of French workplaces. The unsettling question may even be raised of whether members of Scopix, in resisting ancient forms of management methods such as Taylorism, have not unintendedly favoured the emergence of forms of control that ultimately bear resemblance to those promoted by more recent waves of managerialisation. The culture of craft maintained at Scopix contains indeed some elements of cultural control in that it relies on a similar principle of internalisation of the norm (Casey, 1999; Willmott, 1993). The forms of peer-control developed in the co-operative are not totally unrelated neither to the forms of peer-surveillance stemming from the introduction of semi-autonomous work teams (Delbridge, 1998; Sewell, 1998). In sum, in resisting managerialisation, members of Scopix may have favoured the development of forms of organisation which some observers would call self- or peer-management, that is to say which they would still call management (Grey, 1996; Lopdrup-Hjorth et al., 2011).

### ***Conclusion: towards the recognition of organisations against management?***

I have insisted in the theoretical section of the paper on the fact that alternative organisations (and among them co-operatives) must, in order to remain truly alternative, preserve themselves from the pervasiveness of management. In this frame, the analysis of the Scopix's case shows that it is possible to build a multifarious opposition to managerialisation

by simultaneously mobilising approaches that stem from the three perspectives – technical, elite and political – on managerialisation. In view of this, I eventually propose the concept of ‘organisation against management’ in order to label those organisations in which the absence – or limited presence – of the managerial agenda should actually be interpreted as the expression not of a lack but rather of a rejection. Scopix provides such an example of an organisation against management in the sense that what could appear in the first place as a lack of management, in particular for the ethnographer who indulges in management research, should actually be understood rather as the intended outcome of an anti-managerial stance (Parker, 2002).

The concept of organisation against management does not simply aim to coin an elegant expression to characterise organisations that decide turning their back on managers, managerial discourses, methods and tools. It also has the higher ambition of further contributing to the advent of the sort of Copernican revolution which would consist in no longer considering management as a taken-for-granted feature of organisations but rather as a contingent mystery (and even maybe anomaly) in constant need of elucidation (Grey, 1999). Within this perspective, examples of organisations against management would no longer constitute intriguing anachronisms but rather the fixed reference points from which to ponder over the actual meaning of management.



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# CONCLUSION



La partie conclusive de la thèse comprend trois temps. Dans un premier temps, je me propose de résumer et mettre en perspective les contributions issues des trois articles de la thèse. Dans un deuxième temps, je discute certaines des limites et pistes de recherche future associées à mon étude. Dans un troisième et dernier temps, je partage les résultats issus de la mise en œuvre d'une des toutes dernières étapes de la démarche ethnographique, en l'occurrence l'appréciation des effets de l'enquête sur l'objet étudié, en donnant à voir les retours des coopérateurs sur le travail de recherche en général et sur mon étude en particulier.

### **Les contributions principales de la thèse**

Dans cette section, je me propose de résumer et mettre en perspective les contributions issues des trois articles de la thèse. Je synthétise d'abord les apports des différents articles à l'étude des relations de pouvoir. Je me réfère ensuite à la notion de bureaucratie professionnelle pour resituer, en particulier au regard de ces enjeux de pouvoir, la place occupée par Scopix au sein d'un ensemble plus large d'organisations présentant des caractéristiques proches. Finalement, je discute la façon dont interagissent chez Scopix les trois modes organisationnels associés à la coopérative, tout à la fois organisation hybride, organisation démocratique, et bureaucratie professionnelle.

### ***Synthèse des contributions***

En proposant une synthèse des contributions des différents articles, mon but n'est pas ici de rappeler chacune de ces contributions. Celles-ci ont en effet été détaillées à l'intérieur de chacun des articles. Mon but est plutôt de mettre brièvement en avant les enseignements plus globaux qui pourraient être tirés de l'ensemble constitué par les trois articles, en repartant pour cela des trois axes de recherche que j'avais mis en avant dans mon introduction. Pour mémoire, ceux-ci incluaient un axe de recherche principal, centré sur les relations de pouvoir telles qu'éprouvées au quotidien par les coopérateurs (j'utilise également fréquemment l'expression « pouvoir, contrôle et résistance » afin de qualifier cet axe de recherche), ainsi que deux axes de recherche secondaires, reliés voire subordonnés au premier, et centrés respectivement sur l'expérience concrète du travail et la mobilisation des outils de gestion.

S'agissant de la compréhension des relations de pouvoir, l'axe de recherche principal envisagé dans le cadre de mon étude, les résultats présentés mettent en évidence l'intérêt d'étudier des formes d'organisation éloignées des entreprises capitalistes classiques. Cela est vrai des coopératives qui, en tant notamment qu'organisations démocratiques, peuvent

présenter des éléments idiosyncratiques propres à renouveler le regard du chercheur, comme par exemple, chez Scopix, la présence d'ouvriers qui sont chefs de leurs propres chefs. Cela est vrai a fortiori des sociétés indiennes étudiées par Clastres (1974, 2012[1980]), la possibilité de chefs sans pouvoir offrant un renversement de perspective particulièrement propice à repenser les questions de pouvoir, contrôle et résistance. La notion de cas extrême (Denzin et Lincoln, 2005) exprime bien en définitive le potentiel de recherche associé à ce type d'organisations. Le terme désigne en effet des sites empiriques qui, parce qu'y sont neutralisées une ou plusieurs propriétés caractéristiques des contextes classiques, rendent plus saillants certains mécanismes dont ils facilitent ainsi l'analyse. Les mécanismes dont le cas extrême permet de révéler l'existence sont bien souvent également à l'œuvre dans ces contextes plus classiques, quoique plus difficiles à détecter. Dans le cas de Scopix, le caractère démocratique et la propriété partagée de l'entreprise attachés au statut coopératif (article 2), ainsi que l'orientation artisanale attachée à l'activité de tôlerie (article 3) tendent effectivement à neutraliser les effets de hiérarchie propres aux entreprises classiques, rendant incertaines les assignations habituelles qui font du pouvoir (ou du contrôle) l'attribut des responsables et de la résistance l'attribut des subordonnés. Ainsi, l'étude d'un cas extrême suggère à la fois que, même dans une organisation classique, les notions de pouvoir, contrôle et résistance capturent avant tout des phénomènes situationnels (Thomas et Hardy, 2011), et qu'affirmer l'égalité peut contribuer à ébranler jusqu'aux relations de pouvoir semblant pourtant les mieux institutionnalisées (Rancière, 1991 ; Huault *et al.*, 2014).

Le deuxième axe de recherche préalablement envisagé dans le cadre de mon étude concerne la réalité concrète du travail. C'est, du point de vue méthodologique, l'adoption d'une démarche d'observation participante qui devait me permettre d'intégrer au mieux cette dimension à ma réflexion. Cette attention portée au travail permet deux contributions principales. Premièrement, elle déplace l'étude de la coopération du lieu favori que semble lui avoir assigné la littérature, c'est-à-dire les problématiques de gouvernance et les recherches souvent très prescriptives auxquelles elles donnent lieu, vers des rivages plus propices à la prise en compte de l'expérience quotidienne des coopérateurs. En conséquence, elle substitue aux visions parfois fantasmées des relations de pouvoir offertes par les approches basées sur la gouvernance une compréhension des mécanismes par lesquels se construisent en pratique (et dans la contingence) les rapports de force qui visent (toujours en pratique) à actualiser l'idée de coopération (article 2). Deuxièmement, elle impose de ne pas limiter cette idée de coopération au respect avant tout formel d'une liste de droits et devoirs dérivée des statuts

coopératifs, commandant au contraire au chercheur de vérifier les façons dont elle se décline jusqu'aux niveaux les plus fins de l'organisation concrète du travail (article 3) (Kasimir, 1996 ; Clarke, 1984).

Le troisième axe de recherche préalablement envisagé dans le cadre de mon étude se rapporte aux outils de gestion. Cette dimension n'apparaît en définitive qu'assez peu dans les articles présentés. Cela dit, elle contribue à documenter, au moins en creux, certaines facettes des relations de pouvoir observables chez Scopix. En effet, les coopérateurs semblent conscients que les outils de gestion sont susceptibles de contribuer à stabiliser les relations de pouvoir et orienter les comportements dans des directions qui leur paraissent défavorables au respect de leur autonomie ou des rapports égalitaires censés régir l'organisation (Strum et Latour, 2006 ; Chiapello et Gilbert, 2013). Cela se traduit soit par le rejet pur et simple des outils de gestion (dans l'article 3, la fiche de contrôle ou, à un degré moindre, la feuille orange), soit par leur acceptation sous condition (la pointeuse, dans l'article 2, dont l'usage doit pour être toléré concerner tous les salariés-associés). En dépit de cela, ou peut-être au contraire pour cette raison même, le champ est laissé relativement libre à l'émergence de technologies de contrôle peu outillées (c'est-à-dire, pour reprendre les termes de Strum et Latour, 2006, « complexes » plutôt que « compliquées ») et peu coûteuses, qui sont donc tout autant accessibles aux ouvriers qu'au management (dans l'article 2, les mécanismes reposant sur la dette par lesquels les chefs sont empêchés d'être des chefs).

Ces différents éclairages, suscités par l'étude des problématiques de pouvoir, contrôle et résistance au sein de Scopix, font parfois écho à des observations déjà formulées à propos d'autres structures caractérisées par une forte orientation professionnelle : universités, hôpitaux, cabinets d'expertise, etc. Il est donc nécessaire désormais de resituer la place occupée par Scopix au sein d'un ensemble plus large d'organisations présentant des caractéristiques souvent proches.

### ***Organisations hybrides, organisations démocratiques et bureaucraties professionnelles***

Dans mon introduction, j'ai relié les coopératives et par conséquent Scopix à deux catégories d'organisations : d'un côté, les organisations hybrides (Battilana et Lee, 2014), de l'autre les organisations démocratiques (Johnson, 2006). C'est dans les deux cas le statut même des coopératives qui autorise à les ranger sous ces étiquettes génériques. Une coopérative repose par définition sur la poursuite à la fois d'objectifs économiques et d'objectifs sociaux (ou « civiques » pour reprendre le terme utilisé, en rapport avec la sociologie des conventions,



dans le premier article de la thèse), ce qui la range, au même titre par exemple qu'une entreprise sociale, dans la catégorie des organisations hybrides. Similairement, le contrôle exercé par les membres, tel que généralement résumé par le slogan « un homme une voix », est inscrit lui aussi au cœur du statut coopératif, reliant ce type d'organisations à la famille plus large des organisations démocratiques, au côté des partis politiques, syndicats, mouvements sociaux, etc. Mais à ces deux modes organisationnels inhérents à la définition de la coopération, vient s'en ajouter dans le cas de Scopix un troisième. Contrairement aux caractères hybride et démocratique, ce troisième mode n'est pas contenu dans les statuts coopératifs et c'est seulement l'enquête empirique qui, de manière inductive, a permis de le mettre à jour. Ainsi que le montre en effet le troisième article de la thèse, Scopix possède de nombreuses caractéristiques de ce que Mintzberg (1993[1983]) appelle une « bureaucratie professionnelle ».

La typologie proposée par Mintzberg recense cinq structures organisationnelles : la structure simple, la bureaucratie mécaniste, la bureaucratie professionnelle, la forme divisionnelle et enfin l'adhocratie (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 153). Au sein de cette typologie, la bureaucratie professionnelle désigne des organisations qui favorisent les décentralisations verticale et horizontale. Les personnes y travaillent de manière relativement autonome, la coordination de leurs activités étant avant tout assurée par la standardisation des compétences. Les membres du noyau opérationnel (*operating core*), c'est-à-dire ceux qui font concrètement ce pour quoi la structure est faite, occupent une position tout à fait centrale dans l'organisation et tentent de minimiser l'influence des administratifs en valorisant le caractère professionnel des tâches réalisées (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 153–154). Parmi les organisations ou secteurs d'activités qui s'approchent au plus près de l'idéal-type de la bureaucratie professionnelle se trouvent les universités, les hôpitaux et certains cabinets d'expertise (notamment ceux d'experts-comptables), c'est-à-dire principalement des organisations ou secteurs délivrant des services. Néanmoins, Mintzberg n'oublie pas d'y faire figurer certaines formes de production artisanale :

‘... Professional Bureaucracies can be found in manufacturing, too ... This is the case of the *craft enterprise*, an important variant of the Professional Bureaucracy. Here the organization relies on skilled craftsmen who use relatively simple instruments to produce standard outputs. The very term *craftsman* implies a kind of professional who learns traditional skills through long apprentice training and then is allowed to practice them free of direct supervision. Craft enterprises seem typically to have tiny

administrations—no technostructures and few managers, many of whom, in any event, work alongside the craftsmen.’ (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 204 ; italiques de l’auteur)

En m’appuyant sur les caractéristiques principales des bureaucraties professionnelles telles que décrites par Mintzberg, je vais maintenant recenser les éléments qui apparentent effectivement Scopix à ce type de structure organisationnelle, mais aussi ceux qui tendent au contraire à l’en distinguer. Cet exercice devrait me permettre de resituer le cas de Scopix au sein de l’ensemble plus large constitué par les organisations à forte orientation professionnelle, dont l’université et l’hôpital fournissent à ma connaissance les exemples les mieux documentés par la littérature.

Un des premiers aspects qui permet d’identifier Scopix à une bureaucratie professionnelle touche à la nature des tâches réalisées par le noyau opérationnel. Le travail met en jeu des compétences standardisées acquises à travers une formation appropriée (« les gars qui sont du métier »), mais est néanmoins suffisamment complexe (« avoir l’œil du tôlier ») pour qu’une latitude considérable soit laissée dans son exécution à l’ouvrier (« faire son boulot »), qui bénéficie donc d’une autonomie importante (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 190–191). Les besoins en coordination sont chez Scopix dans leur majeure partie assurés par cette standardisation des compétences (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 191–192), les pièces à réaliser étant allouées aux différents ouvriers en fonction de leur capacité à traiter des pièces plus ou moins complexes. Ensuite, c’est bien également des standards externes (même si ceux-ci ne proviennent pas d’une puissante association professionnelle autonome comme en connaissent les médecins ou les experts-comptables), à savoir ceux qui leur ont été inculqués au cours de leur apprentissage, qui semblent guider les tôliers dans leur travail plutôt que ceux que l’organisation chercherait à leur imposer (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 191–192). C’est pour cette raison que j’ai pu entendre le responsable technique reprocher fréquemment aux coopérateurs la sur-qualité de leurs finitions (« ça, ça n’est pas compris dans le prix payé par le client ! »).

Le rapport entre le noyau opérationnel et son support administratif est par contre plus ambigu chez Scopix qu’il ne l’est dans la bureaucratie professionnelle-type envisagée par Mintzberg. Chez cette dernière, le support administratif est tout entier subordonné au noyau opérationnel, dont le coût élevé justifie qu’on le débarrasse des tâches de routine susceptibles de retarder son activité principale (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 194). La situation est plus équilibrée chez Scopix parce que les salaires des tôliers sont sans comparaison avec ceux des médecins ou des experts-comptables. Dans le cas de la tôlerie, le marché tend au contraire à rémunérer plus

généreusement les administratifs que les ouvriers et seul l'égalitarisme associé à la forme coopérative permet donc d'éviter que les rémunérations de ceux-ci ne prennent trop largement le pas sur celles de ceux-là. La relation directe avec les clients est aussi moins présente chez les tôliers qu'elle ne l'est chez les professeurs (avec leurs étudiants), médecins (avec leurs patients) et experts-comptables (avec leurs entreprises clientes) (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 190, p. 195, p. 203). Même s'il n'est pas rare de voir un client pénétrer dans l'atelier et, après avoir serré quelques mains, se diriger directement vers le box où travaille l'ouvrier en charge de ses pièces (en particulier dans le cas d'un prototype), le lien fort qui unissait historiquement le tôlier à ses clients propres s'est largement distendu (voir article 3) et les fonctions de responsables commercial, technique et méthodes, ou encore de chef d'atelier, centralisent aujourd'hui la majorité des contacts avec les clients.

Ces premières comparaisons m'amènent à traiter maintenant plus directement des questions de pouvoir, contrôle et résistance. Dans une bureaucratie professionnelle, les membres du noyau opérationnel résistent aux tentatives de rationalisation de leurs compétences, car celles-ci viendraient menacer leur autonomie et transformer à terme l'organisation en bureaucratie mécaniste, c'est-à-dire en une organisation où la technostructure assujettit le noyau opérationnel grâce à la standardisation des tâches (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 203). Cela implique aussi que les technologies (*the technical system*, dans les termes de Mintzberg) mises en œuvre dans les processus opérationnels restent relativement simples, des systèmes sophistiqués étant susceptibles de déterminer trop fortement les tâches et leurs contenus ou tout au moins d'en assurer une régulation trop stricte (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 203–204). Les bureaucraties professionnelles sont donc, dans leur version-type, caractérisées par l'association de compétences complexes à des outils et dispositifs simples : 'the surgeon uses a scalpel, the accountant a pencil' (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 203). Ces caractéristiques sont bien présentes chez Scopix, tout particulièrement dans sa section assemblage (voir article 3), confirmant qu'elles ne sont pas l'apanage des organisations de service mais peuvent aussi se trouver réunies dans des activités productives ayant conservé un ancrage artisanal (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 204).

Par ailleurs, les ouvriers de Scopix sont, comme les professionnels décrits par Mintzberg (1993[1983], p. 195), soumis au contrôle quasi-exclusif de leurs pairs. C'est ici, dans le cas de Scopix, qu'interviennent les mécanismes de valorisation du travail bien fait et de stigmatisation du manque d'artisanat décrits dans le troisième article de la thèse. Les tôliers semblent d'ailleurs moins frileux que leurs contreparties des mondes académique et médical

lorsqu'il s'agit de sanctionner les comportements qui trahissent l'idéal artisanal, même si ces sanctions restent avant tout symboliques (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 208–209).

Au sein d'une bureaucratie professionnelle, les membres du noyau opérationnel ne cherchent pas simplement à contrôler leur propre travail mais également à conserver la maîtrise des décisions administratives susceptibles d'influencer celui-ci. Une des approches utilisées pour ce faire consiste à pourvoir les niveaux intermédiaires et supérieurs de l'organisation avec des professionnels (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 197). Sa mise en œuvre est bien visible chez Scopix : le chef d'atelier actuel n'est autre que le meilleur tôlier, les personnes en charge des méthodes et de la programmation sont issues de l'atelier, tout comme l'écrasante majorité des membres du conseil de surveillance et du directoire. Elle n'est pas tout à fait systématique non plus si l'on songe par exemple au responsable technique actuel issu d'un recrutement externe, mais, significativement, celui-ci, dont l'orientation industrielle tranche violemment avec l'orientation artisanale de Scopix, est assez largement considéré comme une « erreur de casting » par les coopérateurs.

S'agissant des chefs, j'ai souligné dans le deuxième article de la thèse que ceux-ci, qu'ils soient d'ailleurs eux-mêmes issus ou non des rangs professionnels, étaient chez Scopix des chefs sans pouvoir. Mintzberg reconnaît que la rectrice d'une université ou la directrice d'un hôpital disposent de pouvoirs significativement plus restreints que ceux exercés par les responsables d'organisations apparentées aux autres structures de sa typologie (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 198–199). Il rejette néanmoins l'idée selon laquelle de tels responsables seraient complètement dépourvus de pouvoir, en notant par exemple qu'ils jouent un rôle important aux frontières de l'organisation, dans la gestion de sa relation à des parties tierces (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 199). Clastres relevait déjà cette caractéristique à propos du chef Indien : s'il lui est demandé d'être bon orateur, c'est aussi parce qu'il a la charge de la diplomatie intertribale et qu'il est « l'homme qui parle au nom de la société lorsque circonstances et événements la mettent en relation avec les autres » (Clastres, 2012[1980], p. 105). Cela dit, il préférerait n'y voir qu'une forme de porte-parolat plutôt que l'indice de l'exercice d'un quelconque pouvoir (Clastres, 2012[1980], p. 104–107, 2012, p. 39). Il est permis de porter la même appréciation sur Scopix dans la mesure où toute initiative de politique extérieure non conforme à la volonté des coopérateurs y est impensable, sauf à entraîner le désaveu immédiat du chef. Mintzberg semble d'ailleurs le concéder un peu plus loin, quand il écrit que **'the professional administrator keeps his power only as long as the professionals perceive him to be serving their interests effectively'** (Mintzberg,

1993[1983], p. 200 ; mise en gras de l’auteur), pour finalement conclure que ‘that power can easily be overwhelmed by the *collective* power of the professionals’ (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 200 ; italiques de l’auteur).

Pour contester l’argument selon lequel l’administrateur professionnel n’aurait aucun pouvoir, un autre des constats formulés par Mintzberg est que, même si son pouvoir de contrôle direct sur les professionnels est en effet quasi-nul, il lui est loisible en revanche d’exercer un pouvoir indirect au sein de la structure, à travers la gestion des conflits entre professionnels ou entre professionnels et administratifs (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 199). Pourquoi est-il alors si difficile d’observer l’exercice d’un pouvoir de cette nature chez les chefs de Scopix ? C’est ici peut-être qu’entrent en jeu certaines spécificités de la coopérative par lesquelles les fonctions de responsabilité tendent à être neutralisées (voir articles 2 et 3). J’ai noté plus haut que Scopix utilisait l’approche commune aux bureaucraties professionnelles consistant à pourvoir les fonctions intermédiaires et supérieures avec des professionnels (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 197). Le principe est de faire faire à des professionnels issus du noyau opérationnel plutôt qu’à des professionnels de l’administration (autrement dit, des managers) les tâches administratives susceptibles d’influencer le travail du noyau professionnel. Mais dans le cas de Scopix, il faut bien constater qu’il s’agit le plus souvent non pas de *faire faire* mais plutôt de *faire ne pas faire*, c’est-à-dire de mettre en position théorique de faire tout en dessaisissant dans le même mouvement des ressources pratiques, à la fois symboliques et matérielles, qui permettraient effectivement de faire. C’est particulièrement évident dans le cas du directoire à qui ne sont octroyées que quelques heures par semaine pour faire (ou, plus justement, ne pas faire) son travail. Mais c’est également visible, à un degré moindre, chez le chef d’atelier, qui s’attelle encore assez fréquemment aux tâches de production qui ont par le passé occupé son quotidien, ou encore chez le responsable technique, que les coopérateurs cherchent dans les faits à cantonner au seul suivi des prototypes et opérations de sous-traitance.

Si l’on cherche maintenant à résumer les résultats de l’exercice ainsi mené, force est de constater que Scopix possède un nombre très important de caractéristiques l’apparentant à une bureaucratie professionnelle. Il s’agit donc d’une étiquette tout à fait appropriée dès lors qu’il est question de caractériser cette organisation en première analyse. Seules deux dimensions révèlent en définitive des contrastes notables entre Scopix et l’organisation-type pensée par Mintzberg. En premier lieu, le support administratif n’occupe pas chez Scopix une position complètement subordonnée au noyau opérationnel, ce dont témoignent par exemple la relative mainmise de ce dernier sur la relation client et l’équilibre salarial régissant les deux groupes.

Le rapport entre le noyau opérationnel et le support administratif observé chez Scopix rappelle donc par certains côtés la configuration rencontrée dans la bureaucratie mécaniste et, de ce point de vue, Scopix constitue donc une bureaucratie professionnelle quelque peu diminuée, en partie perméable au mouvement de bureaucratisation mécaniste qui a très largement affecté son secteur d'activité. En second lieu, là où les responsables d'une bureaucratie professionnelle sont à même d'exercer certains pouvoirs indirects sur l'organisation, les chefs de Scopix apparaissent eux dépourvus de toute influence. Au contraire du point de contraste précédent au regard duquel elles se trouvaient atténuées, les caractéristiques de la bureaucratie professionnelle sont cette fois exacerbées et Scopix fait donc sous ce rapport figure de cas extrême. En définitive, Scopix présente un bilan ambigu : les propriétés qui l'apparentent à une bureaucratie professionnelle certes dominant, mais celles qui l'en distinguent vont aussi bien dans le sens d'une atténuation que dans celui d'une exacerbation des caractéristiques attachées à ce mode organisationnel.

Enfin, au-delà des enseignements apportés par cet exercice comparatif, il est permis de s'interroger plus largement sur certaines des interprétations que Mintzberg propose de la bureaucratie professionnelle. En voulant chercher à résumer la question du pouvoir au sein de ce type de structures, Mintzberg affirme que l'autorité n'y est pas de nature hiérarchique mais professionnelle, ou encore que c'est l'expertise qui, dans une bureaucratie professionnelle, confère du pouvoir plutôt que le statut hiérarchique (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 192). Si l'expertise prend dans ce type de structures effectivement le pas sur la hiérarchie, il est cependant permis de se demander si Clastres ne voit pas plus juste que Mintzberg en faisant de cette expertise une source de prestige plutôt que d'autorité (Clastres, 2012[1980], p. 139). J'ai déjà relevé cette différence d'appréciation à propos de la conduite des relations extérieures de l'organisation, Clastres voyant avant tout du porte-parolat, c'est-à-dire une charge honorifique (Clastres, 2012[1980], p. 104–107, 2012, p. 39), là où Mintzberg détecte lui du pouvoir (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 199). Chez les Indiens, au côté de l'art de la parole (Clastres, 2012[1980], p. 136), deux autres formes d'expertise sont particulièrement valorisées : celle que met en jeu la chasse (Clastres, 1974, p. 32–33) et celle que met en jeu la guerre (Clastres, 2012[1980], p. 239). Mais dans les sociétés étudiées par Clastres, le prestige conféré par le fait d'exceller dans les activités cynégétiques ou guerrières n'est jamais synonyme de pouvoir : le groupe s'assure que le prestige demeure un but en soi, propre à asservir son détenteur à la volonté collective plutôt qu'à l'en libérer (Clastres, 2012[1980], p. 238–239). Chez Scopix, il est pareillement difficile en définitive d'identifier des exemples

d'ouvriers capitalisant sur le prestige conféré par leur maîtrise artisanale de façon à exercer du pouvoir sur leurs pairs (voir à ce titre le cas du chef d'atelier dans les articles 2 et 3). Dès lors, le doute reste possible quant au sens ultime à donner à l'analyse de Mintzberg : dans la bureaucratie professionnelle-type, le prestige attaché à l'expertise se convertit-il réellement en autorité ou Mintzberg se méprend-il simplement, projetant une illusoire autorité sur ce qui n'est en fait que prestige?

### ***Effets de renforcement : l'organisation démocratique à l'appui de la bureaucratie professionnelle***

Ayant recensé les éléments qui apparentent Scopix à une bureaucratie professionnelle et ceux qui l'en distinguent, il est désormais possible de discuter des effets d'interaction que ce mode organisationnel entretient avec les deux autres modes organisationnels associés à Scopix. En d'autres termes, il est désormais possible de s'interroger sur la mesure dans laquelle Scopix-bureaucratie professionnelle influence par exemple Scopix-organisation hybride, Scopix-organisation hybride Scopix-bureaucratie professionnelle, etc.

Un premier constat appelé par la lecture combinée des articles 2 et 3 est que Scopix-bureaucratie professionnelle rend possible Scopix-organisation démocratique. Les membres de Scopix comprennent avant tout la démocratie comme une exigence d'égalité au sein de l'organisation, qui passe par la mise en échec des tendances oligarchiques qui chercheraient à s'y faire jour. Pour se mettre au niveau de cette exigence, ils désignent des chefs qu'ils empêchent ensuite d'être des chefs (voir article 2). La question qui se pose alors est celle de la possibilité de faire fonctionner une organisation dont les chefs sont sans pouvoir. Et c'est bien dans les caractéristiques propres aux bureaucraties professionnelles que les coopérateurs vont chercher les solutions organisationnelles permettant de répondre favorablement à cette question. L'orientation artisanale de Scopix limite d'entrée les besoins de coordination, dont le résidu est assuré par la standardisation des compétences ; les coopérateurs travaillent de manière autonome, sous le seul contrôle (pas toujours bienveillant) de leurs pairs (voir article 3). Ce premier effet de renforcement est assez conforme à ce que prédisent les développements théoriques associés au concept de bureaucratie professionnelle. Mintzberg note en effet à plusieurs reprises que le contrôle exercé par les professionnels sur leur propre travail et sur les décisions susceptibles de l'affecter tend à favoriser la collégialité et encourager un fonctionnement plutôt démocratique (Mintzberg, 1993[1983], p. 197). Scopix-bureaucratie professionnelle joue donc contre les phénomènes de dégénérescence

organisationnelle susceptibles d'affecter négativement Scopix-coopérative (Storey *et al.*, 2014) et contre, plus largement, les phénomènes d'oligarchisation qui menacent Scopix-organisation démocratique (Michels, 1915).

Le fait d'afficher les propriétés d'une bureaucratie professionnelle aide également en partie Scopix à assumer son statut d'organisation hybride. L'hybridité, c'est-à-dire le fait pour une organisation de cultiver à la fois des objectifs économiques et des objectifs sociaux, n'est pas chez Scopix, il faut bien le constater, le mode organisationnel le plus affirmé. L'idée d'engagement envers la communauté y est largement absente et l'intérêt des membres constitue donc le seul objectif de nature civique poursuivi par les coopérateurs (voir introduction et article 1). Son volet le plus visible est le partage des profits permettant aux ouvriers de compenser la modestie de leurs revenus de base. Mais un second volet concerne les conditions de travail et, de ce point de vue, le caractère de bureaucratie professionnelle porté par Scopix va dans le sens de l'autonomie et de l'absence de rationalisation et d'intensification, contribuant à alimenter l'intérêt des membres et donc, plus ou moins directement, la nature hybride de l'organisation. Ainsi, l'orientation professionnelle de Scopix concourt à éviter que les objectifs sociaux de la coopérative ne cèdent progressivement le pas devant ses objectifs économiques. En ce sens, Scopix-bureaucratie professionnelle joue contre les phénomènes de dégénérescence des fins (*goal degeneration*, ou encore *mission drift*) susceptibles de porter atteinte à l'intégrité de Scopix-organisation hybride (Cornforth *et al.*, 1988).

En sens inverse, le caractère de bureaucratie professionnelle cultivé par Scopix est également influencé par les autres modes organisationnels associés à la forme coopérative, en particulier par son caractère démocratique. L'examen de Scopix montre que l'ambition démocratique de la coopérative et l'égalitarisme parfois forcené par lequel cette ambition se traduit concourent à la valorisation de formes de travail autonome telles que celles considérées comme consubstantielles au concept de bureaucratie professionnelle. Le caractère démocratique exerce également une influence sur les deux aspects vis-à-vis desquels Scopix affiche des écarts avec la bureaucratie professionnelle-type. Ainsi que je l'ai déjà noté à propos des chefs, l'égalitarisme des coopérateurs tend à exacerber ce qui n'est encore chez Mintzberg qu'une limitation et mise sous contrôle du pouvoir pour en arriver chez Scopix à une absence quasi-totale de pouvoir. C'est cet égalitarisme qui empêche également que les salaires du support administratif ne prennent le pas sur ceux du noyau opérationnel, limitant dans ce cas la tendance qu'aurait Scopix à s'éloigner de la bureaucratie professionnelle-type. Scopix-



organisation démocratique tend soit à renforcer certaines des caractéristiques de Scopix-bureaucratie professionnelle, soit à atténuer le risque d'affaiblissement de certaines autres de ces caractéristiques. En résumé, les caractères démocratique et professionnel de Scopix sont donc engagés dans des mécanismes de renforcement croisés, qui rendent d'ailleurs assez hasardeuse l'identification d'une éventuelle prééminence ou antériorité d'une des deux composantes de la relation sur l'autre.

L'influence de Scopix-organisation hybride sur Scopix-bureaucratie professionnelle est en revanche difficile à mettre en évidence. Le caractère hybride est, je le répète, des trois modes organisationnels associés à Scopix, le moins saillant. Ceci m'amène à penser que la relation est cette fois unidirectionnelle, Scopix-bureaucratie professionnelle contribuant plus ou moins indirectement à préserver Scopix-organisation hybride. De la même façon, les liens unissant Scopix-organisation hybride et Scopix-organisation démocratique semblent eux aussi relativement distendus. La Figure 1 tente de résumer schématiquement les interactions ainsi décrites, et au centre desquelles se trouve Scopix.

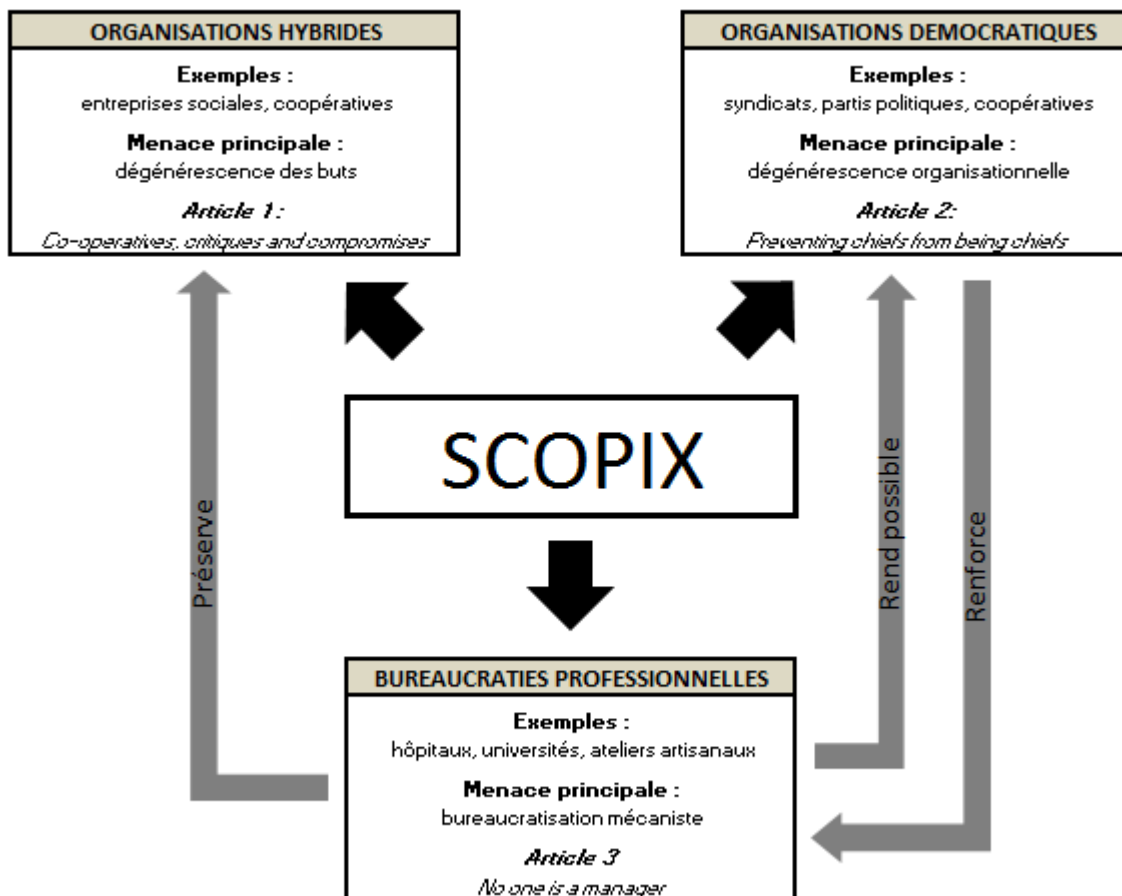


Figure 2 : Effets d'interaction entre les trois modes organisationnels associés à Scopix

### Limites et pistes de recherche future

Dans cette section, je discute quelques-unes des limites et pistes de recherche futures soulevées par le travail de recherche effectué. J'aborde notamment la question du lien entre les niveaux micro et macro dans la méthode ethnographique. J'envisage ensuite quelques-unes des contributions à la compréhension des phénomènes de pouvoir, contrôle et résistance à l'œuvre chez Scopix que rendraient éventuellement possibles une étude plus systématique de la dimension sonore propre à cette coopérative et un recours plus assumé à une démarche auto-ethnographique.

#### *Une limite : le lien entre les niveaux micro et macro dans la méthode ethnographique*

En conformité avec la tradition interprétative dans laquelle j'ai cherché à inscrire l'étude ethnographique de Scopix, mon objectif premier était de documenter de la façon la plus riche possible le point de vue natif. Il s'agissait entre autres de caractériser ce qui fait

l'appartenance au groupe étudié à travers la description et l'analyse des pratiques les plus quotidiennes des coopérateurs. Une des critiques régulièrement formulée à l'égard de ce type d'approche concerne l'occultation du contexte plus large, à la fois historique, social et politique, dans lequel s'inscrit l'unité culturelle ainsi étudiée (Marcus et Fischer, 1999[1986] ; Marcus, 1986). Plutôt que d'envisager le site empirique considéré 'as an isolate with outside forces of market and state impinging upon it' (Marcus et Fischer, 1999[1986], p. 77), l'ethnographe devrait reconnaître que 'the "outside forces" ... are an integral part of the construction and constitution of the "inside," the cultural unit itself, and must be so registered, even at the most intimate levels of cultural process' (Marcus et Fischer, 1999[1986], p. 77). Dans cette optique, un cas tel que celui de Scopix ne pourrait seulement s'analyser comme mettant en scène la résistance d'une poignée de coopérateurs aux contraintes imposées par le système capitaliste. Au contraire, il serait possible d'y identifier avec une certaine précision les mécanismes d'un système dont Scopix participerait à la construction plutôt qu'il ne le subirait. Dit autrement, le cas Scopix ne devrait plus être lu comme la description d'une enclave cherchant à se protéger des lois du marché (le statut peu ou prou véhiculé par les métaphores commodes du « village gaulois » ou de la « réserve d'Indiens », et évidemment renforcé par l'attirail théorique Clastrien mobilisé dans le deuxième article de la thèse), mais devrait pouvoir nous dire quelque chose de l'état du capitalisme.

Est-ce le cas ? Et si oui, quoi ? Ces questions sont d'autant plus légitimes que la tradition des ethnographies d'atelier, tradition à laquelle je me suis référé dans mon introduction, s'est souvent efforcée d'y répondre. En décrivant au plus près les processus de production et la place des ouvriers dans ceux-ci, les auteurs concernés – ceux en particulier associés au courant de la *Labour Process Theory* – n'ont eu de cesse de décrypter le fonctionnement du capitalisme. C'est particulièrement probant chez Burawoy (1979) où la description des mécanismes de ludification (*gamification*) et d'internalisation du marché du travail à l'œuvre chez Allied Corporation l'amène à caractériser de manière convaincante la nature et les évolutions structurelles majeures portées par le capitalisme monopoliste (*monopoly capitalism*), à savoir le brouillage des relations capitalistes par la stimulation du consentement des travailleurs. Burawoy (2013) va aujourd'hui plus loin encore dans sa volonté de concilier les niveaux micro et macro : pour s'éviter une certaine forme de cécité, il lui aurait selon lui fallu ne pas s'arrêter à resituer l'atelier étudié dans le contexte du capitalisme américain mais plus largement dans celui de la compétition économique internationale. C'est en définitive une image de ce que Wallerstein appelle le « système-monde » que le site ethnographique,

quelque étrié qu'il puisse de prime abord paraître, renfermerait en lui et serait donc sommé de livrer à l'ethnographie (Marcus et Fischer, 1999[1986]).

Plusieurs éléments m'amènent, dans le cas de Scopix, à tempérer cette ambition. Premièrement, la capacité à relier le lieu ethnographié au système général d'économie politique dans lequel il s'inscrit semble à ce jour être un privilège quasi-exclusif des approches néo-marxistes associées à la *Labour Process Theory* (Burawoy, 2013), et ce dans le sillage de la maître-enquête de Willis (1981[1977]) sur la contribution du système éducatif britannique à la reproduction de sa classe ouvrière. Le constat effectué dès les années quatre-vingt par des ethnographes tels que Clifford, Marcus ou Fischer (Marcus et Fischer, 1999[1986] ; Marcus, 1986), selon lequel 'the Marxist system imagery remains the most convenient and comprehensive framework for embedding single-locale ethnography in political economy' (Marcus, 1986, p. 173) et ce probablement pour encore longtemps (Marcus et Fischer, 1999[1986], p. 87), semble trente ans plus tard validé. Le cas de Scopix, lui, se prête mal à l'analyse marxiste puisque la distinction entre capital et travail y est d'entrée neutralisée par la forme coopérative. Même si de nombreux auteurs sont conscients du caractère anachronique de l'application d'une grille de lecture trop uniment marxiste à l'heure où la notion de classe ouvrière est considérée comme problématique – c'est notamment le cas de Burawoy (2013), qui suggère désormais d'en appeler à Polanyi plutôt qu'à Marx –, ils n'offrent pas pour autant les clefs de l'architecture théorique alternative qui permettrait de lier de manière un tant soit peu systématique les observations de terrain à la marche plus générale du monde.

Cette première remarque m'amène directement à un deuxième élément de modération, celui du choix du site empirique. Si Burawoy (Burawoy, 1979) s'est intéressé à Allied, c'est parce qu'il y voyait une illustration exemplaire des mutations récentes du capitalisme. De la même façon, si Delbridge (1998) s'est intéressé à des implantations japonaises au Royaume-Uni, c'est parce qu'il cherchait à identifier, au travers des effets de la pénétration des méthodes nippones, les prémisses d'un possible changement de nature dans les rapports capitalistes. Je me suis orienté vers Scopix pour des raisons précisément inverses, parce que je cherchais à étudier une organisation dont le fonctionnement s'éloignait le plus possible de ce que je croyais être les tendances dominantes du capitalisme, autrement dit une organisation alternative. Ainsi Scopix met-il en scène des activités de nature ouvrière dans le cadre d'une société de plus en plus tertiaisée, avec des pratiques autogestionnaires allant à rebours de ce qui se donne à voir par ailleurs au sein d'organisations de plus en plus managériales. Pour

ces raisons, il est plus facile et sans doute aussi plus réaliste de considérer Scopix comme un isolat soumis aux forces externes du système capitaliste que comme un élément participant pleinement de la constitution et du renouvellement de ce système. Si le cas Scopix peut parler de l'évolution du capitalisme, c'est donc probablement avant tout en creux.

Le travail ethnographique de Kasmir (1996), consacré à la ville de Mondragon et au système coopératif basque, mérite à ce stade d'être discuté. Pourquoi Kasmir, qui s'intéresse elle aussi aux coopératives, accorde-t-elle à son terrain ce que je viens précisément de refuser au mien, c'est-à-dire la capacité à témoigner de certaines évolutions du système capitaliste ? C'est que pour Kasmir, très critique du système coopératif basque (elle parle, pour en dénier le caractère exemplaire, du « mythe de Mondragon »), le niveau de dégénérescence atteint par Mondragon Corporation est tel (Kasmir, 1996, p. 180–181) que son fonctionnement relève sans ambiguïté des formes de management participatif (cercles-qualité, équipes autonomes, etc.) largement mises en œuvre par les grandes entreprises multinationales dans les années quatre-vingt et quatre-vingt-dix de façon à augmenter le contrôle sur les salariés et, en définitive, amplifier le processus d'accumulation capitaliste (Kasmir, 1996, p. 4–9). Kasmir commence bien par souligner le changement de nature fondamental impliqué par le fait que les ouvriers sont propriétaires de l'entreprise et possèdent le droit de la gérer (Kasmir, 1996, p. 7), mais finit par montrer qu'il ne s'agit chez Mondragon que d'un leurre. Elle ramène en définitive la propriété des membres aux schémas de participation (ESOP pour *Employee Stock Ownership Plan*) en vogue chez les multinationales et destinés à brouiller les divergences d'intérêts objectifs entre propriétaires et salariés voire entre managers et ouvriers (Kasmir, 1996, p. 196–197). De la même façon, elle souligne que l'existence d'un droit (en l'occurrence celui de gérer l'entreprise) ne se traduit pas forcément par l'exercice d'un pouvoir réel (en l'occurrence par les ouvriers à qui ce droit est octroyé par les statuts de la coopérative) (Kasmir, 1996, p. 143). La comparaison effectuée par Kasmir entre une des usines de Mondragon et une entreprise capitaliste classique d'une taille et d'un secteur d'activités comparables ne tourne pas véritablement à l'avantage des ouvriers de la première. Elle peut donc en conclure que le modèle coopératif participe, au côté des entreprises capitalistes classiques et d'ailleurs plus sournoisement que celles-ci, du brouillage des divergences d'intérêts objectifs entre ouvriers et managers, de l'affaiblissement des forces syndicales, et plus généralement de la mise au pas de la classe ouvrière en résultant.

Rien de tel chez Scopix. Il est bien possible de relier certains des attributs observés chez les ouvriers de Scopix à des phénomènes de plus grande ampleur, par exemple l'absence quasi-

complète de conscience de classe et d'orientation militante (Bigi *et al.*, 2015). Mais pour le reste, sauf à découvrir un jour que Scopix constituait un poste avancé de processus de reprofessionnalisation, démanagériation voire démondialisation dont les signaux sont encore aujourd'hui trop faibles (voire inexistantes pour les deux premiers) pour qu'ils puissent être assimilés à des tendances de fond, il semble pour le moins hasardeux de vouloir identifier dans la trajectoire de Scopix quelque chose comme des clefs de lecture à même de faciliter la compréhension des mutations à l'œuvre dans le capitalisme contemporain. Il faut donc se résoudre, dans un contexte pluraliste tel que celui décrit dans le premier article de la thèse, à ce que le travail ethnographique continue, au côté d'études aux visées sans doute plus ambitieuses, à produire de simples témoignages de la pluralité des formes organisationnelles autorisée par le contexte plus large au sein duquel ces formes viennent prendre place.

Après avoir discuté, en lien avec l'usage de la méthode ethnographique, une limite importante du travail de recherche effectué, je vais maintenant aborder deux pistes de recherche future, que j'identifie comme à même de prolonger voire renouveler ma réflexion sur les questions de pouvoir, contrôle et résistance au sein de Scopix. La première concerne un objet d'étude relativement négligé par la littérature, en l'occurrence la dimension sonore du phénomène organisationnel. La seconde touche, à nouveau en lien avec la méthode, aux possibilités analytiques ouvertes par une démarche auto-ethnographique.

### ***Une première piste de recherche future : pouvoir, contrôle et résistance... et radio***

La dimension sonore revêt un caractère primordial dans l'appréhension du contexte de travail offert par Scopix. J'ai déjà mentionné dans ma présentation du site empirique les nuisances occasionnées par les niveaux de décibels considérables associés à l'usage de certains outils ou machines (poinçonneuse, taraudeuse, meuleuses, ponceuses, marteaux, maillets, etc.). Cette propriété du site étudié a en premier lieu des incidences d'ordre technique sur la mise en œuvre de la méthode ethnographique : c'est le plus souvent une difficulté car le bruit rend difficile la perception de ce qui se dit alentour, mais aussi, plus rarement, une opportunité car ce même bruit conduit les ouvriers à élever la voix, rendant audibles (sous certaines configurations favorables) des échanges autrement destinés à ne pas dépasser le petit cercle des interlocuteurs concernés. Mais au-delà de cet aspect très technique, la dimension sonore de l'atelier m'est immédiatement apparue comme un élément d'intérêt pour une autre raison : parce qu'au côté d'éléments visant à atténuer le volume sonore (bouchons d'oreilles et plus rarement casques), les ouvriers mobilisent également des éléments visant au contraire à

ajouter du son au son. Chez la majorité d'entre eux, le poste de radio constitue un élément à part entière de l'aménagement de l'espace de travail. Pareillement, le vieux poste de télévision noir et blanc joue un rôle central dans le dispositif de la cuisine commune où une partie des ouvriers prennent leurs repas du midi. J'ai dans un premier temps énormément souffert de ces habitudes. La radio ne constituait pour moi qu'une agression sonore supplémentaire qui venait s'ajouter à celles perpétrées quasi-continuellement par les machines. Lorsque Willy, l'ouvrier avec qui j'ai travaillé les premières semaines à l'ébavurage, s'éloignait du poste de travail, j'éteignais la radio pour échapper un temps aux rires stupides de l'émission du matin et au retour cyclique (jusqu'à quatre ou cinq fois par jour) de la vingtaine de chansons composant le répertoire musical limité de sa station favorite. Le journal télévisé, bruyamment diffusé dans la cuisine, constituait pour moi lui aussi une agression sonore, à un moment de la journée où je n'aspirais qu'à retrouver une certaine forme de calme et de sérénité. Ce n'est qu'assez progressivement que j'ai appris à tolérer voire apprécier leurs présences terriblement intrusives.

Les travaux portant sur le phénomène sonore au travail sont rares (Braun, 2012), et ceux qui s'intéressent plus spécifiquement au rôle de la radio ou de la musique le sont plus encore (Braun, 2012 ; Prichard *et al.*, 2007). Même si certaines ethnographies d'atelier mentionnent au détour d'une phrase la présence de l'une ou l'autre au sein du contexte étudié (par exemple Delbridge, 1998, p. 90 ou Pollert, 1981, p. 132), celles-ci n'accèdent pour autant jamais chez ces auteurs au statut d'objets de recherche de plein droit. A ma connaissance, seuls les travaux de Korczynski (2007 ; 2011 ; 2014) tranchent avec cette indifférence aux dimensions sonores du travail. Ils mettent notamment à jour la tension dialectique qui parcourt les pratiques sonores des employés de l'usine étudiée, la musique consommée dans l'atelier (et souvent actualisée par le chant) servant tout à la fois à confirmer les rapports de domination inscrits dans les processus de production et à ouvrir aux ouvriers des possibilités de résistance à ces mêmes rapports. J'ai en conséquence, ainsi que je l'ai précisé dans mon introduction, pris soin de documenter au cours de mes derniers mois passés sur le terrain de manière assez systématique cette dimension de l'environnement de Scopix. C'est d'ailleurs la seule dimension sur laquelle j'ai entrepris une recherche d'informations véritablement proactive (quand je me suis pour le reste essentiellement contenté d'enregistrer les données venant à moi), amenant en particulier les coopérateurs à s'exprimer sur leur usage de la radio.

Mon hypothèse est que les pratiques sonores qui ont cours chez Scopix ne sont pas à détacher des analyses des relations de pouvoir que j'ai proposées dans les deuxième et troisième

articles de la thèse, mais permettent au contraire d'en renouveler l'éclairage. Dans la plupart des sites étudiés par la littérature, l'écoute de la radio passe par des systèmes de diffusion centralisés qui obligent les employés à écouter un même programme, sur lequel il leur est parfois demandé de préalablement se mettre d'accord (2007). Des contraintes peuvent également peser sur la nature des contenus accessibles ou encore la durée d'écoute quotidienne (Delbridge, 1998, p. 90). Chez Scopix, ce type de contraintes est comme dans bien d'autres domaines absent et les coopérateurs sont donc relativement autonomes dans leurs usages. Au système centralisé (que certains ouvriers me confirment avoir connu dans les usines où ils ont précédemment opéré) se substituent les postes de radio individuels, qui laissent au coopérateur les choix du programme et de la durée d'écoute (il est difficile ici de ne pas envisager une analogie dans laquelle le système centralisé représenterait la vision industrielle de l'atelier par opposition à la vision artisanale incarnée par les postes individuels). Les coopérateurs qui travaillent dans des boxes contigus et ne peuvent se permettre, sous peine de cacophonie, d'écouter des stations différentes doivent quant à eux s'accorder : certains en viennent à partager le même matériel, disposant une enceinte de chaque côté de la cloison qui les sépare ; dans d'autres cas, c'est le détenteur du matériel le plus puissant qui impose finalement ses goûts à son voisin et le contraint à écouter sa station de prédilection. A noter également qu'aux programmes musicaux, certains membres de Scopix préfèrent ceux dominés par la parole, pourtant proscrits dans d'autres entreprises à cause de leur plus grande faculté à déconcentrer et détourner de leurs tâches les salariés : trois coopérateurs sont par exemple adeptes de la station RMC, où la matinée est consacrée à la politique (*Bourdin Direct* entre 7 et 10 heures) et l'après-midi aux relations intimes (*Lahaie, l'amour et vous* entre 14 et 16 heures).

Par ailleurs, les contenus radiophoniques (chansons et discussions) et télévisuels consommés sur le lieu de travail ont les uns comme les autres la capacité de provoquer des réactions (ce que Korczynski nomme *elicitation*) qui participent, soit pour les renforcer, soit pour les contester, de l'actualisation des relations de pouvoir (Korczynski, 2007 ; Korczynski, 2011). J'ai fait état dans le deuxième article de la thèse de l'usage que les coopérateurs font d'un dialogue issu d'une publicité (« c'est qui le patron ? c'est moi le patron ») afin de nourrir les mécanismes visant à empêcher les chefs d'être des chefs. A côté de cet exemple très parlant, j'ai aussi été témoin à de nombreuses reprises au cours des repas du midi d'échanges entre coopérateurs (et impliquant très souvent un membre du directoire) dans lesquels une situation rapportée par le journal télévisé était implicitement projetée sur le cas de Scopix pour donner



lieu à ce type d'actualisation. Un travail d'analyse plus systématique reste donc à mener sur la façon dont les coopérateurs usent, avec un sens de l'à-propos parfois admirable, des ressources discursives mises à leur disposition par les contenus radiophoniques et télévisuels pour actualiser la culture de Scopix, notamment ses orientations égalitaire et artisanale.

### ***Une seconde piste de recherche future : de l'ethnographie à l'auto-ethnographie***

Plusieurs des épisodes empiriques exposés dans la thèse me mettent directement en scène. C'est le cas dans le deuxième article puisque je suis au centre de la blague potache qui voit Edmond confectionner et m'inciter à porter un masque de carton en réponse à l'injonction de travailler en temps masqué formulée par André, le responsable technique. C'est également le cas dans le troisième article où, plus significativement, l'évocation de ma propre trajectoire au sein de l'atelier me sert à illustrer certains effets du contrôle par les pairs basé sur les compétences artisanales tel qu'il se déploie chez Scopix. Un examen réflexif de mon attachement aux activités de pliage me permet alors d'éclairer certains des enjeux identitaires et des émotions mis en œuvre dans cette forme de contrôle. La question est en conséquence posée de l'intérêt possible d'une approche et d'un type d'écriture plus ouvertement auto-ethnographiques que ceux que j'ai finalement choisis d'assumer dans la thèse (Doloriert et Sambrook, 2012). Haynes définit l'auto-ethnographie comme un 'genre of qualitative, reflexive, autobiographical writing and research which uses the researcher as subject' (Haynes, 2011, p. 135). L'auto-ethnographie engage donc l'ethnographe dans des formes de dévoilement personnel (*self-disclosure*), qui se traduisent par la dissémination de traces intimes dans son texte (*self-inscription*) (Reed-Danahay, 2001). Dans les faits, la distinction entre l'ethnographie et l'auto-ethnographie est parfois ténue (Boyle et Parry, 2007) et cette dernière est d'ailleurs à envisager sous la forme d'un continuum dans lequel les éléments de nature personnelle sont plus ou moins dominants : d'« auto-ethnographiques », les textes deviennent « auto/ethnographiques » voire « autoethnographiques » au fur et à mesure que s'affirme la présence de leur auteur(e) (Doloriert et Sambrook, 2012).

Certains objets d'études ou contextes se prêtent tout particulièrement au déploiement d'une approche auto-ethnographique (Adams, 2011). C'est le cas lorsque l'ethnographe ne peut avoir accès au phénomène qu'elle souhaite étudier à moins d'en faire elle-même l'expérience (Adams, 2011, p. 165). Il en va ainsi de certains « processus éminemment personnels de construction identitaire » (Boyle et Parry, 2007, p. 188), dont Kondo (1990) et Adams (2011) nous fournissent des illustrations. C'est vrai également de divers phénomènes

organisationnels présentant un caractère tabou au sein de la littérature et mettant en jeu un fort contenu émotionnel (Boyle et Parry, 2007, p. 189), tels le harcèlement (Haynes, 2011 ; Vickers, 2007). Dans cette optique, le recours à l'auto-ethnographie ne présentait pas de réelle plus-value s'agissant d'étudier les mécanismes mis en œuvre par les coopérateurs pour empêcher leurs chefs d'être des chefs : ces mécanismes, très visibles, s'offrent en effet aisément au regard de l'ethnographe. A contrario, la compréhension du mal-être des chefs résultant de ces mécanismes (« je me sens isolé en tant que responsable technique », « est-ce qu'on ne devrait pas parler de harcèlement pour un directoire ? », etc.) pourrait bénéficier – pour peu, évidemment, qu'il soit possible au chercheur d'accéder à une fonction de responsabilité au sein de Scopix – d'un traitement auto-ethnographique par lequel les ressorts des frustrations attachées à l'apprentissage du statut de chef sans pouvoir gagneraient en visibilité. Dans le même ordre d'idée, le troisième article aurait pu se prêter à l'application d'une démarche plus systématiquement auto-ethnographique dans la mesure où le contrôle par les pairs repose sur la manipulation des émotions positives (fierté, satisfaction du travail bien fait, sentiment de maîtrise) et négatives (peur, honte, sentiment d'inadéquation) générées par l'orientation artisanale de Scopix. Un récit retraçant plus minutieusement mon parcours dans l'atelier, et faisant appel à des techniques réflexives pour rendre compte de mon appréhension des différents postes occupés et de l'évolution correspondante de mes interactions avec les autres ouvriers, pourrait contribuer à préciser la nature du contrôle par les pairs à l'œuvre chez Scopix, le faisant alors apparaître comme un processus de subjection capable de profondément affecter les constructions identitaires des coopérateurs (Du Gay et Salaman, 1992 ; Sewell, 1998).

Un autre aspect, peu abordé dans le travail que j'ai présenté, mais particulièrement adapté à un traitement auto-ethnographique, serait celui de l'hygiène et de la sécurité au travail. Afin de fournir des éléments contextuels propres à mieux caractériser les conditions d'exercice des activités de tôlerie, j'ai mentionné en introduction plusieurs facteurs de pénibilité (manutentions, vibrations, poussières métalliques, bruit, etc.) et de dangerosité. Le traitement par Scopix de ces problématiques est en bien des points illustratif du fonctionnement plus général de la coopérative : une autonomie très importante est laissée à chaque ouvrier, qui décide lui-même des mesures de protection auxquelles il se soumet. Le niveau de protection ainsi choisi est généralement bien inférieur à celui encouragé par les exigences légales, ce dont témoigne l'agitation observée à l'occasion d'une visite impromptue des inspectrices du travail (pendant que quelqu'un retient les agentes de la fonction publique

au niveau des bureaux, quelques coopérateurs distribuent gants et protections auditives ; d'autres s'affairent à remettre en place les protections sur leurs machines ou à ramasser les mégots de cigarettes qui jonchent le sol). D'un côté, l'absence de pression trop forte sur la productivité (voir article 3) dispense les coopérateurs de devoir effectuer des compromis délétères entre sécurité et efficacité. De l'autre, la culture masculine de l'atelier les encourage à faire fi de certains risques associés à leurs activités (Collinson, 1999). S'ajoute à cela, a fortiori dans le cas des ouvriers les moins expérimentés, une connaissance parfois lacunaire des dangers réels encourus. Dans ce contexte qui présente donc certaines spécificités coopératives, la question de savoir comment les ouvriers construisent leur rapport au risque et négocient les différentes identités (autonomie, masculinité, etc.) mises en jeu dans la construction de ce rapport est d'importance et les données collectées devraient me permettre, en les analysant et les restituant dans une perspective auto-ethnographique, d'y apporter des éléments de réponse.

### **Le regard des coopérateurs sur la thèse**

Si l'objectif d'une thèse et plus généralement de la recherche est pour le monde académique de produire de la connaissance sur le monde, la situation ethnographique amène inévitablement l'objet d'étude à lui-même produire en retour de la connaissance sur le monde académique, ou, tout au moins à lui renvoyer l'image de ce qu'il pense qu'il est ou de ce qu'il voudrait qu'il soit. Certes, pour être clair, ce qui dominait dans l'atelier, c'était avant tout l'indifférence (indifférence que l'ethnographe doit d'ailleurs se fixer pour objectif). En témoignaient le retour à intervalle régulier des mêmes questions (« au fait, c'est sur quoi ta thèse déjà ? »), dont les réponses étaient oubliées presque dans l'instant où elles étaient énoncées, et a fortiori les remarques de ceux pour qui la thèse s'était progressivement transformée en stage dans l'atelier. Rares étaient en fait ceux qui voyaient dans le travail de recherche un quelconque enjeu et une injonction du type de celle formulée un jour par un ouvrier nord-africain (« tu parleras bien de la discrimination dans ta thèse, hein... ») relevant de l'exception. Cela dit, le protocole de recherche se rappelait parfois à ceux auxquels il cherchait à s'appliquer (notamment lorsqu'ils me voyaient griffonner des notes ou prendre des photographies), les conduisant alors à formuler certains jugements sur le travail académique.

Ce qui ressortait alors le plus clairement, c'était la primauté accordée aux sciences dures et l'incrédulité vis-à-vis de la possibilité même (sans parler de l'utilité) d'effectuer un travail de recherche en gestion. N'importe quel coopérateur avait en tête au moins un lointain cousin qui

avait effectué une thèse, mais plus sûrement en physique nucléaire ou sur les nanotechnologies qu'en sciences de gestion. Cette suprématie des sciences dites dures dans l'imaginaire collectif associé à la recherche avait au moins deux conséquences sur la vision des coopérateurs. La première était de considérer mon travail comme assez vain, ce qui pouvait s'exprimer sur un mode parfois agressif ou cynique (« on t'paye avec nos impôts pour faire ça !? »), parfois empreint de sollicitude (alors que je photographiais un des artefacts présentés dans le deuxième article de la thèse : « mais tu prends pas ça en photo quand même ?! c'est la machine à côté qu'il faut que tu prennes... »). La seconde était de mettre en avant des critères de représentativité et de normativité, et donc d'insister sur le fait que Scopix ne pouvait en aucun cas constituer un bon terrain de recherche puisqu'il ne s'inscrivait pas dans l'honnête moyenne des coopératives (« t'es mal tombé, on n'est pas comme les autres coopératives ici »<sup>19</sup>) ni ne mettait en œuvre la vision idéalisée de la coopération.

De façon à poursuivre cette réflexion, j'ai ensuite cherché à recueillir les retours des coopérateurs sur certains passages de la thèse. Même si les formes traditionnelles d'autorité ethnographique ont pu être contestées depuis les années quatre-vingt (Clifford, 1983), j'entendais bien pleinement assumer la responsabilité de l'interprétation proposée. Mon ambition n'était donc pas la production d'un récit véritablement polyphonique qui mêlerait les voix des natifs à celle du chercheur (Tyler, 1986, p. 126). Il s'agissait plutôt de considérer les retours des coopérateurs comme une source de données supplémentaire (Fischer, 1986, p. 201). C'est une traduction en français du second article de la thèse, celui qui expose les mécanismes par lesquels les coopérateurs limitent le pouvoir de leurs chefs, que j'ai ainsi faite circuler auprès de tous les membres de Scopix plusieurs mois après avoir quitté le terrain.

Plusieurs enseignements sont à tirer de cette expérience. Tout d'abord, qu'il est difficile d'obtenir des retours systématiques des ouvriers sur un tel travail. Un document d'une quarantaine de pages représente déjà un objet intimidant voire rebutant pour les coopérateurs les moins adeptes de la lecture, à quoi s'ajoutent les difficultés liées à la nature académique du travail présenté. Bien que j'y aie adopté une structure originale (brève introduction directement suivie de la section consacrée à la présentation du site empirique, renvoi de la revue de littérature en toute fin d'article) destinée non seulement à souligner le caractère inductif de la recherche mais également à en faciliter la lecture par des personnes non

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<sup>19</sup> Les coopérateurs font alors notamment allusion au fait qu'ils n'ont pas, comme c'est le cas dans la plupart des SCOP, de directeur général – le plus souvent un manager professionnel en place pour plusieurs mandats – mais un directoire – possiblement occupé par des ouvriers et destiné à être régulièrement renouvelé.

rompues aux conventions académiques, la marche reste élevée : « y a des mots que j'comprenais pas », m'avoue ainsi en s'excusant presque un des ouvriers qui, à défaut de jeter définitivement l'éponge, s'en est tenu aux passages les plus descriptifs.

Ensuite, plusieurs commentaires suscités par la lecture du texte rejoignent des jugements déjà exprimés pendant ma présence sur le terrain à propos du décalage perçu entre ce qu'aurait, selon les coopérateurs, dû être mon étude et ce qu'elle s'avère finalement être : « c'est de la sociologie en fait ! », se désole presque l'un d'entre eux ; « t'avais bien caché ton jeu », me fait savoir un autre. Cela dit, la restitution par le document d'éléments intuitivement perçus par les coopérateurs comme trop anecdotiques pour mériter un traitement scientifique suscite des appréciations positives d'autres membres de Scopix. Paul, l'ouvrier à l'origine d'un des deux artefacts humoristiques illustrant l'article, se montre par exemple très flatté en en découvrant la photo. Sa réaction semble indiquer un réel contentement à voir pris au sérieux des éléments qui participent de manière incontestable de l'expérience vécue des coopérateurs. Encore plus significativement, le dialogue suivant semble concéder que l'étude saisit une réalité importante de la coopérative grâce au niveau d'analyse choisi :

Loïc, qui n'a pas encore lu le document : « ça parle de l'humain ? »

Michel, qui en a déjà lu une partie : « ouais, c'est sur l'humain... chez Scopix de toute façon tout est de l'humain, tu sais bien... ».

Un autre des enseignements apportés par les retours des coopérateurs est que les pratiques auxquels ils se livrent comprennent une part d'inconscient sans doute plus importante que celle que je voulais bien initialement leur prêter. Pour deux des coopérateurs avec qui j'ai échangé sur le contenu du document (l'un l'ayant déjà lu intégralement et l'autre pas encore), l'humour potache, que je présente dans mon analyse comme un des trois mécanismes par lesquels les coopérateurs empêchent, en les décrédibilisant, les chefs d'être des chefs, constitue avant tout un moyen de « se marrer un bon coup » – *having a laff*, trait de la culture ouvrière bien documenté chez Willis (1981[1977]) ou Collinson (1992). S'ils admettent volontiers que cet humour potache a bien pour effet de décrédibiliser les chefs et de vider leurs prérogatives de toute éventuelle substance, ils avancent que l'effet recherché ne réside pas en premier lieu là. Un autre coopérateur véhicule une idée très similaire quand il me confie qu'il faudrait selon lui que tous les gars lisent le document afin qu'ils « se rendent compte ». A travers ces remarques, c'est donc le degré d'intentionnalité inscrit dans les

pratiques culturelles qui est à nouveau interrogé (Asad, 1986 ; Clastres, 1974 ; Willis, 1981[1977]), sans qu'aucune réponse simple ne puisse bien sûr être formulée.

Enfin, le dernier enseignement issu des retours des coopérateurs tient au fait que ceux-ci font majoritairement une lecture négative de la façon dont Scopix est dépeint dans le document. Là où je m'efforce pourtant de montrer en quoi des pratiques qui, dans tout autre contexte, apparaîtraient simplement comme déviantes font sens pour une organisation qui vise à préserver son caractère égalitaire et démocratique, les membres de Scopix voient surtout le déficit de légitimité associé à ces pratiques. Une nouvelle fois, les coopérateurs reconnaissent bien volontiers que je n'ai pas cherché à présenter les choses de manière négative, mais conservent néanmoins le sentiment qu'une image défavorable de l'entreprise est véhiculée par l'étude. L'hypothèse qui peut être émise ici est que les pressions culturelles exercées par l'environnement de Scopix rendent difficiles pour les coopérateurs d'assumer ouvertement certaines de leurs pratiques, une difficulté déjà rendue visible dans les décalages précédemment signalés entre les discours et les pratiques observées (voir la section de l'introduction consacrée à l'analyse des données).

Ces premiers retours appellent à la poursuite du dialogue engagé avec les coopérateurs autour des conclusions du travail de recherche, dialogue que j'entends continuer à alimenter en mettant prochainement à leur disposition une traduction du troisième article de la thèse. Il s'agit en cela de faire écho à l'idée selon laquelle une ethnographie n'est réellement bouclée qu'une fois lue voire « consommée » par les membres du groupe étudié, c'est-à-dire quand l'ethnographe peut commencer à rendre compte des effets durables qu'elle a produits sur l'objet étudié (Fayard et van Maanen, 2015).



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